

# Indian Painting

1525–1825

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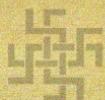
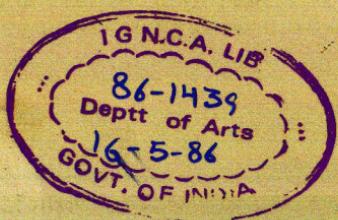
An exhibition arranged and catalogued by  
Terence McInerney

1 April - 30 April 1982  
Monday - Friday 10 am - 5 pm  
Closed Good Friday and Easter Monday

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## Foreword

The Festival of India, currently being held in London, provides the Artemis Group with an excellent opportunity to put on show some of its Indian paintings. We are very pleased to make our gallery available to Terence McInerney, of New York, an associate of the Artemis Group, for the present exhibition. Indeed, we are most grateful to him for both arranging the exhibition and writing the catalogue.

Mr. McInerney wishes to record his gratitude to Simon Digby, Michael Goedhuis, Lisbet Holmes, Francis G. Hutchins, Ravi Kulkarni, Robert M. Light, Glen Lowry, Bashir Mohamed, the Begum Nur, Ellen Smart, Mahrukh Tarapor and Stuart Cary Welch for their assistance. He is also especially indebted to Jitendra Sinh of Wankaner for his excellent translations and advice and to Howard Hodgkin for his stimulating help and encouragement.

The paintings and manuscripts in this exhibition span three centuries of Indian art. Almost all the exhibits have been assembled from our own resources. To these we have been able to add important loans from three private collectors, for whose generosity we are profoundly grateful. Our sincere thanks are also due to the Greater India Company, Inc., Cambridge, USA; Colnaghi Oriental Ltd, London; and the Council of Bedford College, London University.

All exhibits included in the catalogue are for sale, except nos. 1, 10, 18 and 34.

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# Introduction

by Terence McInerney

The paintings in the present exhibition are representative of the last great period of Indian art, a prolonged renaissance which dawned in the late Middle Ages and, gathering force like the rising sun, continued into the 19th century. As in European countries at much the same time, the flowering of India's native painting tradition coincided with her entry into the modern age.

The break with a hieratic mediaeval tradition occurred in the early 16th century. The two major catalysts provide a remarkable study in contrasts: one is mortal, the other divine; each personifies one of the two broad traditions into which Indian paintings are generally divided. Akbar (1542–1605), the third and greatest Mughal emperor, personifies the Muslim, or Mughal tradition. Krishna, eighth incarnation of Vishnu, personifies the Hindu, or Rajput tradition. Yet Akbar and Krishna, like the traditions they personify, are not as different as they might at first appear. Akbar was a man of god-like qualities who established a new religion, the 'Divine Faith'; while Krishna was (and is) the most human of the gods. In some real sense, they are opposite sides of the same coin.

Sectarian distinctions, which often confuse our understanding of Indian painting, reflect historic events dating from the 11th century. Beginning at this time, the syncretic uniformity of Hindu India was abruptly shattered as successive waves of Muslim invaders – Afghans, Turks and, at a later date, the Mughals – brought Northern India under their ever more firm control. A portion of the native population accepted the religion of their overlords during the following centuries. However, the overwhelming majority of Indians remained faithful to their ancient religion. The schism which resulted has endured to the present day: after British rule the Indian sub-continent was partitioned on religious lines. The consequences for Indian painting were far more beneficial. During its period of greatness the tradition was enriched by two parallel strains, the Islamic secular tradition and Hindu religious art.

The tradition of painting which Akbar inspired represents the synthesizing intention of the finest Indian work. Although Babur (r. 1526–30) established the dynasty, Mughal painting is Akbar's creation. Around 1560 this pragmatic genius began to assemble artists from all parts of his Indian empire, and from Persia as well, in order to establish a new style of painting which reflected his own ideas about the nature of man and his place in the world. Realistic portraiture and vivid scenes of daily life were first introduced as subjects during Akbar's reign (1556–1605). Indeed, the Faustian urge which established Mughal painting as a humanistic, secular force – the taste for illustrations of past and current events, for natural history and scientific studies, for landscape and urban views – derives from Akbar's comprehensive vision. In his view, the duty of a painter was to sketch 'everything that has life'.

Drawing and a respect for observed fact are the dual foundations of the Mughal style. These elements are paramount in Mughal works dating from Akbar's reign (cat. nos. 1–5), as well as in those made for his art-loving successors (cat. nos. 9–15). Mughal painting is neither Hindu nor Muslim. The tradition is secular, humanistic, philosophical and non-dogmatic. It appealed to Hindu and Muslim patrons alike. Provided that a Mughal painter could draw like an angel, his religion was of no importance to anyone but himself.

It might seem perverse to stress the importance of drawing in an exhibition devoted to an art form which is celebrated for its brilliant colour. Yet an Indian knows colour as a fish knows water. A miserable scrap of an Indian painting can have wonderful colour; but the beauty of line and the moral purpose, which committed drawing entails, are found only in the best and most serious examples.

For as long as the Mughal empire lasted, i.e. until 1857, the imperial court maintained a sophisticated drawing and painting tradition and a secular, humanistic approach which constituted the high, metropolitan style for most of India. As its influence began to reach the courts in outlying areas, it tended to modify or supersede the existing local styles. (A. Topsfield, *Painting for the Rajput Courts in The Arts of India*, B. Gray, ed., Oxford, 1981, p. 162). Artists from the major centres of painting in Hindu Rajasthan – from Bikaner (cat. nos. 21–24), Kishangarh (cat. nos. 26–28), and elsewhere (cat. no. 29) – absorbed the principles of the imperial style, as did artists from that other fertile region of native painting – the Punjab Hills (cat. nos. 34–35).

Yet the Mughal tradition, which was comprehensive in many ways, could not satisfy one basic need: Mughal painting is not a religious art. Of course, the Delhi emperors and their subjects who were Muslim did not require religious painting. Indeed, their religion forbade it. Yet for the majority of Indians, who were Hindu, the need for representations of the gods and for illustrations of the major legends, which explain their myriad forms, never lost its power. For this reason the Hindu, or Rajput, tradition of Indian painting maintained its *raison d'être* during Mughal times.

Certain pundits of Indian painting often ignore the fact that both Hindu and Muslim live in the same world. The features of Hindu religious painting which are usually advanced as evidence of their pure, untainted, non-Mughal integrity – the brilliant colour and expressive distortions of form (cat. nos. 25, 30–33) – are for the most part incidental to their essential meaning. Hindu religious painting is far more 'advanced' – modern and humanistic – than its misty-eyed guardians will normally allow.

Indeed, the Hindu impulse towards a more personal and humanistic treatment of religious themes pre-dates Akbar and the development of the Mughal secular tradition. The impetus resulted from the growth of popular devotional cults centred on the worship of Krishna which, from the 15th century onwards, inaugurated a wholly new form of religious sentiment among the Hindus. Krishna is not an incarnation, or avatar, in the usual sense of a god born into the world for a specific purpose. As a human incarnation of Vishnu, he is 'full God and full man'. As such, his dual nature inspired the cult of *bhakti* (passionate surrender to a personal god of love) and opened the hidebound tradition of mediaeval painting to a world of human feeling.

Long before the resurgence of the Krishna cult had become a major cultural force, the mediaeval tradition had ossified into an art of repetitive and stereotyped compositions. The style was conceptual, two-dimensional, cursory in line and restricted in colour. Any trace of daily life or personal feeling was shunned as a contamination of ritual purity. In the 16th century, however, as Hindu painters began to grapple with the problems resulting from their desire to render Krishna's human attributes and to illustrate his earthly existence, they were gradually forced to accommodate both human emotion and the visible world. This new pictorial language and religious sentiment which the Krishna cult inspired were communicated in time to the other cults – in particular to that of Rama, who was Vishnu's other human incarnation (cat. nos. 6, 7, 21, 32–34). Thus religious painting was gradually transformed.

This development is already apparent in the earliest painting included in this exhibition, a folio of circa 1525 (cat. no. 20) from the *Bhagavata Purana* (the major Krishna text). The advent of Mughal painting only strengthened the humanizing impulse which had already become discernible in Hindu painting at this early date. The Mughals inspired Hindu painters to a greater finesse of line and detail, a more ample sense of space and form, a more subtle use of colour and a more comprehensive, yet specific, treatment of the visible world (cat. nos. 6, 7, 21, 22). All of these new skills affected the appearance of post-mediaeval Hindu art. Yet they did not alter its underlying intention to validate religious experience in human terms.

Whether Hindu or Muslim, whether secular or religious, Indian paintings always deal with the same question: What is man? The argument is better whispered than shouted. Small in size, Indian paintings were held in the hand when needed; otherwise they were stored. They are intensely personal, made by one man for the eyes of another, his patron. As in a letter, the level of communication is immediate and direct.

The tradition itself was essentially graphic. The Indian painter sat on the

ground while working, with one knee flexed to support a drawing board. (S. C. Welch, *Imperial Mughal Painting*, New York, 1978, p. 12). His tools and materials were deceptively simple; brushes made with fine hairs; pigments made from minerals, or from earth, insect, or animal matter; gum arabic, the aqueous binding medium for pigments; cloth fibre papers of varying thickness, smoothness and fineness; and a piece of polished agate for use as a burnishing tool.

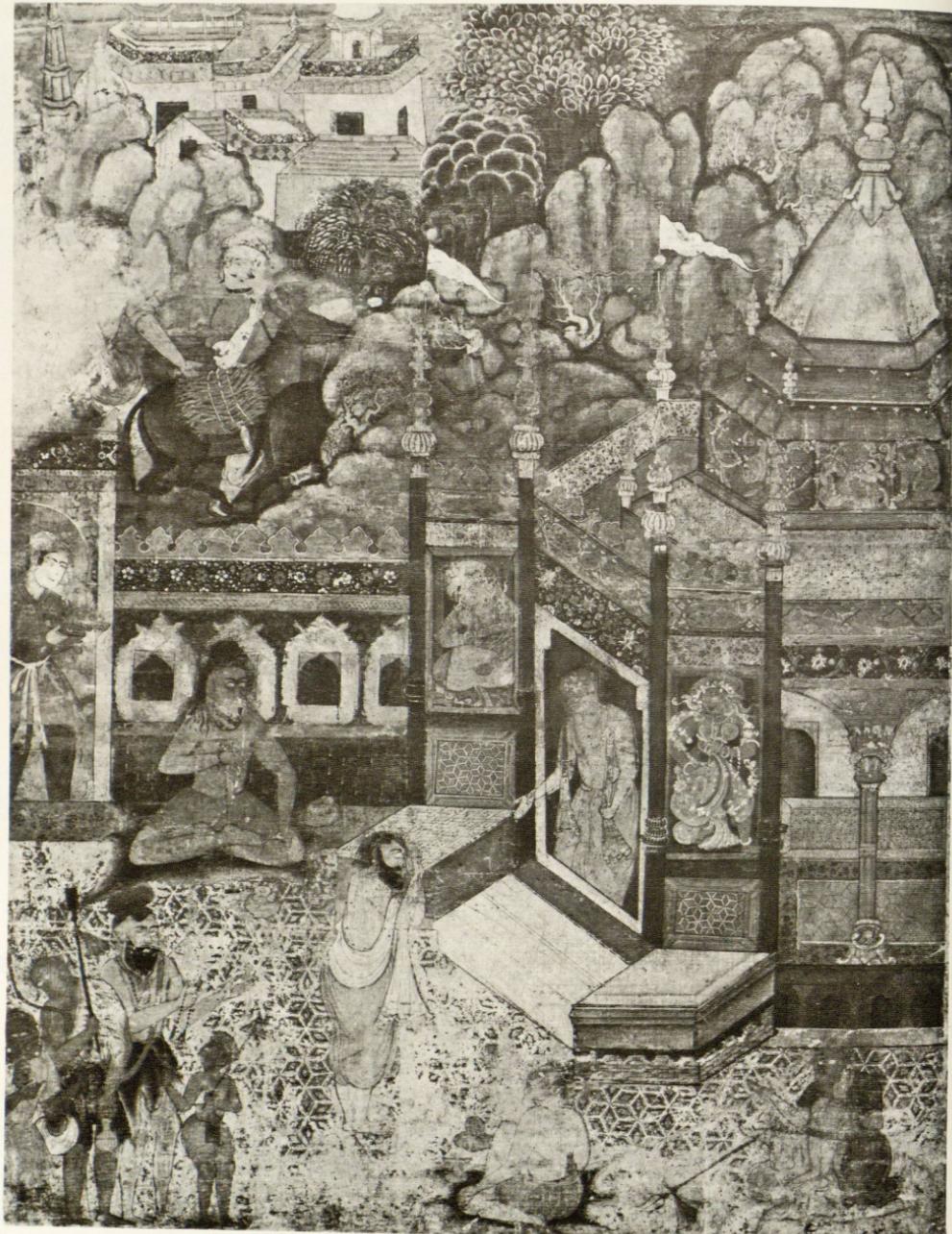
Most Indian paintings are works on paper. The brush is the tool for drawing as well as colouring. The treatment is formal and organizational. Brush strokes follow forms, composing and simplifying them, in order to achieve firm contours and crisp lines. The manipulation of inherent chromatic properties – colours either recede or come forward – limits the need for internal modelling. One local colour serves as the background for another, and each separate patch of colour is always circumscribed by form-defining lines. In Indian painting, colour is the glorious matrix for a network of lines.

The humanistic potential of line – the expressive shorthand of thought and emotion – liberated the Indian imagination and brought it in touch with the modern world. Line is the moral animus and the *lingua franca* of the Indian painting tradition.

# Catalogue



Indira Gandhi National  
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## 1 A Temple Courtyard

Illustration to the *Qissa-i Amir Hamza (Hamza-Nama)*

Mughal, circa 1562–77

Opaque watercolour on cloth, heightened with gold

Considerable paint loss and small areas of retouching over all

27 $\frac{1}{16}$ ×21 in (70×53.3 cm)

### Literature

P. Chandra, *The Cleveland Tuti-Nama Manuscript and the Origins of Mughal Painting*, Chicago, 1976, no.24, pp.30–31, plate 8 (exhibition catalogue)

Lent by a private collector, London

Although Babur established the Mughal dynasty in 1526, Mughal painting came into existence only some three decades later. It was inspired, indeed created, by Akbar the Great (r. 1556–1605), the third and most gifted ruler of the line. The most remarkable project dating from his reign (and one of the earliest) is the famous *Hamza-Nama* manuscript of circa 1562–77. The unusually large illustrations from this seminal work are all painted on cotton in a bold, dynamic, highly original style which was virtually unprecedented in Indian or Islamic art. The total project was staggeringly complex and ambitious. It occupied a team of about fifty artists, working under the direction of a master designer, for a period of approximately fifteen years. The completed manuscript comprised 1,400 paintings, gathered on as many folios, in fourteen volumes. The text for each painting was written (on paper) on the reverse, so that a storyteller might read it aloud as he lifted up the painting for his audience to see. Sadly, only about a tenth of the original paintings have survived. The greater part of these are now in the Museum for Applied Arts, Vienna, and the Victoria and Albert Museum. (See H. Glück, *Die Indischen Miniaturen des Haemzae-Romanes in Österreichischen Museum für Kunst und Industrie in Wien und in anderen Sammlungen*, Leipzig, 1925; see also Akademische Druck-und Verlagsanstalt, *Hamza-Nama*, Graz, 1974, to be completed in three volumes.)

The *Hamza* painting catalogued here illustrates the power of design and subtlety of execution which is typical of the manuscript as a whole. The dynamic rocks, colourful architecture and explosions of foliage edged with gold are particularly distinctive of the bold, emphatic style which characterizes the best Mughal painting during Akbar's early years. Unfortunately, the damaged condition of the present example is also typical of the current state of many *Hamza* paintings. After the manuscript was looted by Persian marauders in 1739, many of its paintings suffered considerably. Yet the areas of damage and retouching, which affect many of them, rarely obscure their real quality. 'This leaf is of special interest. In the depiction of the images adorning the temple the artist shows a familiarity with much earlier Eastern Indian painting or with some Eastern Indian derived style which might have survived even into the 16th century.' (P. Chandra, *op. cit.*, p.30)

For another rare Mughal painting on cloth, see cat. no.2.





## 2 A Prince on an Elephant in a Procession

Mughal, *circa* 1575–80

Opaque watercolour on cotton; mounted on an 18th century album

Painting 13×15½ in (33×39 cm)

The painting is trimmed on all sides. It has suffered considerably from paint loss and staining in some areas. The faces of three figures along the left margin have been repainted, and the head and body of the principal elephant have been filled with flat areas of tone. Otherwise there is no retouching and, despite the considerable damage, the surviving broad areas of the original paint surface evoke the brilliance of the original painting (and drawing).

### Provenance

Lady Herringham, 1929

Bedford College for Women, London University.

### Literature

B. Gray, *A New Mughal Painting on Stuff*, *Ars Islamica*, vol. IV, 1936, pp.459–61, figs. 1–2

L. Ashton (ed), *The Arts of India and Pakistan*, London, 1950, no.644, pp.143–44.

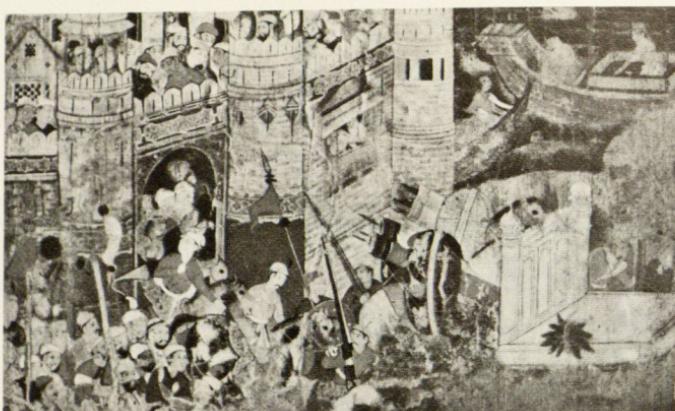
D. Barrett, and B. Gray, *The Painting of India*, Lausanne, 1963, pp.78.

N. Ray, *Mughal Court Painting*, Calcutta, 1975, pp.136–39.

Mughal pictures preserved in books or albums were relatively well protected from India's volatile climate. For this reason paintings of small size and miniaturistic detail have survived in fair number. Immovable wall paintings, on the other hand, which were also an important feature of Mughal patronage, were far more vulnerable and have now virtually all disappeared – apart from some fragmentary and nearly invisible remnants at Fathepur Sikri, dating from *circa* 1580. Fortunately, a few large-scale Mughal works, which were painted on cotton, have survived. Although invariably poorly preserved, these rare works increase our understanding of Mughal art as a whole during its period of greatness.

The Mughals' practice of making paintings on cloth is probably a throwback to the custom of their Mongol forebears of hanging paintings in tents (D. Barrett and B. Gray, op. cit., p.77). The Mughal emperors and their courts spent much of their time on military campaigns or tours of inspection; the vast tent complexes which accompanied their travels were designed to imitate their permanent dwellings. Since Akbar's home palace at Fathepur Sikri was decorated with wall paintings, his travelling palace would have been similarly decorated with panels painted on cotton or some other easily transported material. The most famous Mughal paintings on cloth are those from the seminal *Hamza-Nama* manuscript of *circa* 1562–77 (see cat. no.1). Yet these works, although large in size, are manuscript paintings none the less, since they were originally held in the hand and were never meant to be left on permanent view.

Only three fairly well preserved fragments of actual Mughal panel or wall painting (albeit painted on cotton) have survived, the sole relics of an important class of Mughal painting. The best known of these is the *Princes of the House of Timur*, of *circa* 1550–60, measuring 108 cm square (British Museum 1913 2–81). The painting catalogued here is a second, less well-known example of the same



Hypothetical reconstruction: a painting on cloth (23×38.8 cm), Calcutta Museum (above), and cat. no.2 (below).

*genre*. It can be associated with another fragmentary cloth painting dating from the same period, now in the Calcutta Museum. Both works may have formed two halves of the same monumental composition.

The procession painting on cloth, catalogued here, was at one time owned by Lady Herringham, an early devotee of Indian art, who is also well remembered for her copies of the frescoes at Ajanta. The painting was first published in 1936 in a short notice by Basil Gray. At that time Gray was presumably unaware of the fragmentary cloth painting now in the Calcutta Museum, since it is not mentioned in his article. However, the obvious relationship between these fragments was cited in two subsequent works (L. Ashton (ed), *op. cit.*; and N. Ray, *op. cit.*), although the possibility that they formed two halves of the same picture was not mentioned, nor presumably noticed, in either case. The Herringham painting measures 33×39 cm; the Calcutta painting measures 23×38.8 cm (together making a possible picture measuring 39×56 cm, or larger). The fact that there are obvious relationships in size, style and subject becomes apparent when photo-

graphs of the two separate halves are placed in proper conjunction, one above the other (see monochrome illustration). In the (upper) Calcutta painting, a young prince on horseback is coming out of a fort situated on the banks of a river. He is preceded by a large number of soldiers on horse and foot who are arrayed as a group along the left margin of the picture. In a hypothetical reconstruction, these retainers would in fact complete the arc of serried figures arrayed along the bottom and left margins of the (lower) Herringham picture. In support of this conjecture, one ought to note that, although about 3 cm of the joining strip of cloth have been lost, the *mahout* cut at the waist in the upper left corner of the Herringham picture would regain his head and shoulders if attached to the figure in the lower left corner of the Calcutta picture; and the missing hoof of the piebald horse at the lower centre of the Calcutta picture would find its exact and proper place when associated with the faint pentiment still visible at the top centre margin of the Herringham picture. While other relationships between elements joined in our hypothetical reconstruction are less easy to see because of the large areas of damage which affect both pictures (and incidentally follow similar patterns), enough has survived to suggest other correlations between parts of figures and animals which were probably at one time united.

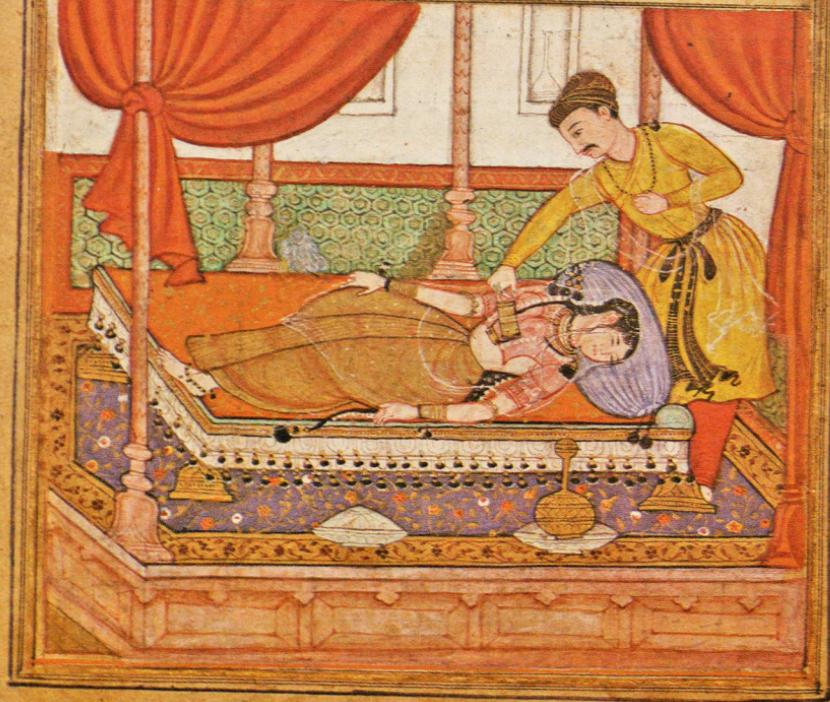
A further argument in favour of this hypothesis is that when viewed together the two paintings make perfect pictorial sense. The isolated bulk of the principal elephant in the Herringham picture is offset by the architectural *namaz* platform at the lower right corner of the Calcutta picture; and the strong diagonal thrust resulting from their conjunction would be contained, within the joined picture, by the arc of figures issuing from the fort, and marshalled along its left and lower margins. These serried figures would likewise harbour the opposite and equally emphatic diagonal thrust which becomes apparent once the principal figures issuing from the fort and the isolated figure on the elephant are brought into line.

Basil Gray has plausibly suggested that the young prince riding the Herringham elephant is Akbar's son Jahangir; while Ray has more recently suggested that the mustachioed prince on a piebald horse, the central figure in the Calcutta painting, is a portrait of Akbar himself. If these figures are correctly identified, the reconstructed composition would then turn out to be, like the *Princes of the House of Timur*, an example of imperial family portraiture of unusually large size which, by means of its bold technique and opportunity for full-scale elaboration, has fully manifest the monumental impulse only rarely attained by Mughal miniature painting.

Both the Herringham and Calcutta paintings recall in style the work of Abd as-Samad, who was one of the earliest and greatest of Mughal painters, the presumed author of the *Princes of the House of Timur* and co-director of the great project on cloth, the *Hamza-Nama* manuscript. The horses and faces in both paintings are almost identical in type with some found in Abd as-Samad's work. However, the attenuated figure style which normally characterizes his miniature painting is not found here. Whether these discrepancies result from Abd as-Samad adjusting to a different technique, or represent traits of another artist working under the master's supervision, is perhaps a question beyond resolution for the present time.



و چنانکه را پس نماد رکست او را کن کر قدم و روی دموی اوبوسیدم واین حکایت  
 بسع پادشاه رسید او برخزد گیر محمل کرد و مران بی کن هبیرید و دلخدا ز من  
 و محلی برگرفت ملزم بسریز دست رفت و هم شوی آواره مانند پادشاه چون این  
 نخن بشنید روی دموی اوبوسید و گفت امی مایه جان این جم خطا بود که تو  
 کردی و این جم خطا بود که از تو در وجود آمد تهی ب خود نهاد دیه  
 و آنچنان پسر بربر با دادی و مراثر منده قیامت کرد ایندی در حال



**3a The King places the Talisman on his sleeping Wife (recto)**

**b The Guard restores the Son to his Mother (verso)**

Two illustrations (on one folio) from the Chester Beatty *Tuti-Nama*

Mughal, *circa* 1580

Opaque watercolour on paper

With six lines of Persian text in *nasta'liq* script on the recto and eight lines of text on the verso.

Paintings:  $6\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$  in ( $15.8 \times 12$  cm) (recto)

$7\frac{1}{8} \times 5\frac{5}{8}$  in ( $18 \times 13.6$  cm) (verso)

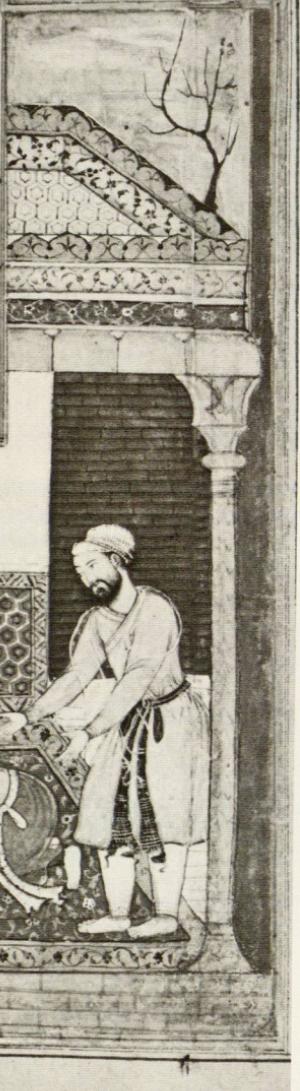
Folio:  $10 \times 6\frac{7}{8}$  in ( $25.4 \times 16.4$  cm)

The *Tuti-Nama*, or *Tales of a Parrot*, is a collection of ancient fables compiled by the Persian writer Ziya'u'd-din Nakshabi in the 14th century. Like the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales* which date from the same period, the *Tuti-Nama* is an endlessly diverting, moral entertainment. It must have been one of Akbar's favourite texts, as two lavishly illustrated copies were produced during his reign. The earlier of these is the famous Cleveland *Tuti-Nama* of *circa* 1560–65, the illustrations of which belong to the earliest phase of Mughal painting. The second manuscript of *circa* 1580 displays the assured, coherent style which Mughal painting had attained by the middle years of Akbar's reign. The unblended pre-Mughal styles, which court artists had not yet learned to conceal in 1560, are hardly apparent in this later work, the greater part of which is now in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (143 folios with 113 illustrations). Various stray folios from the same manuscript are widely scattered in collections throughout the world (including the National Museum, New Delhi; the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benares; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art). The whole manuscript – that is the folios in the Chester Beatty Library together with all the stray folios – is for convenience referred to as the Chester Beatty *Tuti-Nama*.

The two works on a stray folio catalogued here, painted by the same talented artist, are among the finest illustrations from the Beatty *Tuti-Nama* when considered as a whole. The present folio is from the section of the manuscript dealing with the parrot's tale of the fiftieth night. (See *Tales of a Parrot: The Cleveland Museum of Art's Tuti-Nama*, trans. and ed. by M. A. Simsar, Graz, 1978, pp.307–14.) The daughter of the emperor of Rum (Byzantium) had been counselled long ago not to reveal that she had a son by a first marriage. Although she had accepted this advice, the decision proved unwise. Rumours of her repeated meetings with an unknown youth eventually reached the ears of her second husband, the king. Since he had no proof of a romance, he placed a magic talisman on his wife's breast one night while she was asleep, as shown on the *recto* of this folio (colour plate). In this manner he secured her confession which she made in her sleep. The assuaged king, his foolish yet loving wife and her son were all happily reconciled at the story's conclusion, as shown on the *verso* of the present folio (monochrome plate).



حاجب رنجو اندوکفت آن کودک که دل توکشت او فرزندیاران است و دل بگار  
 من کورآن بی کن کجاست و مسدن شمیدکه م جان عمارتی فدا نام حاجب  
 نزین بوس داد و گفت آن کل منوز خذات؟ آن کلین هنوز جسان من او را کشتم  
 و تیخان زنده داشتبا دشاده مرا کشتن و نازد کرد خوش تم با انتشار فرمان کنم کفت آن  
 عکله ها دینپت از شرم برید شاه میکویو گشت نکرد و سه کمن پرسی دارم نزدک مرکش شمش  
 کروزی برات هال من دشن بتو پیمانی سودنار و دنست نافع نیاید و شاکفت  
 تا اور سارند و در پی در انکنند و در جون روی فرزند دیش کفرخای تعالی آجا و بروز نیست  
 شدو از کت ترسی ای درین سلام آه حاجب لین باید داشت بخشت بهتری عمر غایب شد



3b

For the simpler and perhaps more crudely powerful illustrations of the same tale from the earlier, Cleveland *Tuti-Nama*, see *Tuti-Nama, Tales of a Parrot* (complete colour facsimile edition), Graz 1976, folios 323r – 323v. For other illustrations from the Beatty *Tuti-Nama* see P. Chandra, *The Tuti-Nama of the Cleveland Museum* (commentarium), Graz, 1976, plates 47–61, where references to other published illustrations from the same manuscript are also listed.



#### 4 Akbar confronts a giant Snake

Illustration to the Victoria and Albert *Akbar-Nama*

Mughal, *circa* 1590

Opaque watercolour on paper; original border missing

Slightly trimmed; minor paint loss over all

The text folio which would have been pasted to the back of the picture is missing, although the faint imprint of several lines of text is still visible in places on the verso.

Inscribed on the verso:

In Hindi *Mahanag badho dhit spa/Akbar jarumi patepatramadah*  
(The great snake advanced/Akbar emerged victorious)

In Persian *Tasawir Jallaluddin Akbar ba vat ghazi ke baraye Shahryar Kallan rumidan asmar bara va phuvu amadeand*  
(A picture of Jallaluddin Akbar in the company of a ghazi who for the sake of Shahryar Kallan advanced toward the great snake and overpowered it.)

Painting: 12 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 7 $\frac{3}{8}$  in (31.2 × 18.8 cm)

Of the numerous illustrated historical manuscripts produced by Akbar's brilliant atelier, the *Akbar-Nama*, written by Abu'l Fazl, first minister of the realm, is generally considered to be the finest. Unlike those court manuscripts dealing with subjects from the distant past (the *Jami al-Tawarikh*, the *Tarikh-i-Alfi*, the *Babur-Nama*), the *Akbar-Nama* comprises a year by year account of the emperor's own reign. There is, in consequence, a more compelling relationship between the text and the illustrations.

Two illustrated copies of the *Akbar-Nama* were produced during Akbar's lifetime. The original autograph copy of *circa* 1590 is the larger of the two. Its illustrations are more vital and ambitious than those in the later copy of *circa* 1604 which are in the quieter, more epicurean mode which characterized court painting during Akbar's final years. The greater part of this second manuscript is now divided between the British Library and the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, while some stray folios from it are scattered in various public and private collections throughout the world.

Fortunately, the first copy of the *Akbar-Nama* has suffered less from the attention of its admirers, and the greater part of this remarkable manuscript, comprising 274 folios and 116 illustrations, was acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1896. Its few known dispersed pages all relate (with one exception) to episodes from a missing opening section which would have chronicled events preceding 1560, the date at which the Victoria and Albert volume begins. The present work, *Akbar confronts a giant Snake*, illustrating an event of *circa* 1556, is a noteworthy and hitherto unknown stray folio from the London manuscript; in fact, only twelve other dispersed illustrations from the Victoria and Albert *Akbar-Nama* are known. (See M. C. Beach, *The Imperial Image: Paintings from the Mughal Court*, Washington, 1981, pp.83–91).





The story represented is taken from Book I, chapter 28, and was told to Abu'l Fazl by Jiji Ananga, Akbar's wet-nurse:

One day he had gone forth from Dihli to hunt in the district of Palam, and there an enormous and terrific serpent, such as might move the heart of the daring, appeared on the line of the road. On this occasion his Majesty exhibited the miracle of Moses and, without the hesitation which comes even to generous hearts, put forth his white hand and quelled it.

(*Abu'l Fazl, Akbar-Nama*, translated by H. Beveridge, 3 vols., reprint, Delhi, 1972–73. vol. I, p.385).

Since the incident was inserted into the chronology of the *Akbar-Nama* alongside a story from Akbar's infancy – also related by Jiji Ananga – its date must remain conjectural. Owing to its miraculous character, the earlier story was kept secret by Jiji Ananga until Akbar became emperor and was only fully revealed when she was brought news of the slaying of the snake. From this one can reasonably deduce that the later event probably occurred in 1556, the year of Akbar's coronation, or shortly afterwards. He was only thirteen when he ascended the throne, and is clearly a youth in the present picture.

In size, most of the other illustrations from the manuscript are about 2 cm larger than the present work in both dimensions. Although clearly somewhat trimmed, it is still larger than at least two other dispersed illustrations from the manuscript (see E. Grube, *Islamic Paintings in the Collection of Hans P. Kraus*, New York, n.d., no.230, measuring 30.1×18 cm and T. Falk and M. Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library*, London, 1981, no.3, measuring 30.6×18.5 cm) and it is as large as at least two illustrations from the Victoria and Albert section. Visually, it accords well with the bold, dramatic style of the manuscript as a whole. The vivid confrontation with the snake within the counterpoint of scattered trees, and the arc of serried figures along the right margin are particularly striking and dramatically apt. As an example of Mughal landscape painting at its most lyrical, yet rooted in observed fact, the illustration has an important place in the manuscript as a whole. Most of its paintings were produced by two or three artists working together. Although we cannot attribute this painting as yet to a specific team, its size, subject, style and presumed location in the original manuscript leave us in no doubt that this picture belongs to the Victoria and Albert *Akbar-Nama*.

## 5 The Crucifixion

Attributed to Kesu Das

Mughal, *circa* 1590

Opaque watercolour on paper; mounted on an 18th century album page  
Some staining and paint loss revealing the underdrawing in various places;  
otherwise in fine condition.  
11½×7 in (29.5×17.8 cm)

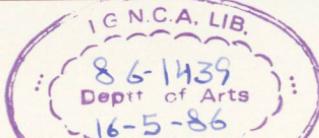
In 1580 the Portuguese Jesuits presented Akbar with a copy of Plantyn's Polyglot Bible, illustrated with mannerist engravings. Since Akbar was heterodox in matters of religion, the worthy fathers were hopeful of his conversion; and from this date onwards the emperor and his court were well supplied with the devotional engravings, and an occasional oil painting. Little could they know that Akbar's interest in these things was essentially akin to that of the later Bourbon's for *chinoiserie*.

Nevertheless, the widespread availability of Christian images had a profound impact on Mughal painting. Mughal artists learned from European art how to show that objects could be made to recede in space by 'blueing' their colours. They also learned how to represent weight and mass, as well as the art of accurate portraiture and psychological characterization, which were alien to their own tradition. Mughal painters acquired all these techniques while making copies or, more often, adaptations of European engravings or paintings. Of the artists specializing in this *genre*, the Mughal painter Kesu Das (fl. 1570–95), one of the greatest of Akbar's painters, was the most distinguished. In Abu'l Fazl's well-known account of the artists working in Akbar's *atelier*, which probably employed more than a hundred painters, Kesu Das is listed fifth among those 'forerunners on the high road of art'.

His career has been summarized and his style analyzed at length in a recent article by M. C. Beach (*The Mughal Painter Kesu Das*, Archives of Asian Art, vol. XXX, 1976–77, pp.34–52). To the corpus of works in a European mode published in that article, one can now add the present work, previously unpublished, which is surely one of Kesu Das' finest pictures. The heavy drapery style, the oval faces with prominent noses, the strong three-dimensional shading in extremely fine lines of brushwork, the landscape background and the strong contrasts in colour and shading are identical to those distinctive features found in all Kesu Das' known work. He painted at least one other *Crucifixion* in about 1590 (now in the Gulshan Album in the former Imperial Library, Teheran, see Beach, *op. cit.*, fig. 6), but there are no foreground figures in that work, and the landscape background is different. The foreground figures in the present work were obviously copied directly from a European engraving (most likely the work of an Antwerp mannerist), yet the painting's beautiful landscape background is probably a free invention, or at least a fusion of various motifs. Whatever the source, the painting is highly effective on its own terms and, despite its Christian subject, essentially Mughal in character.



5



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## 6 King Dasaratha confers with his Prime Minister

Illustration to the *Ramayana*

Mughal, sub-imperial style, circa 1595

Opaque watercolour on paper, heightened with gold

Inscribed on the verso with six lines of Sanskrit text and a one-line summary in mediaeval Hindi

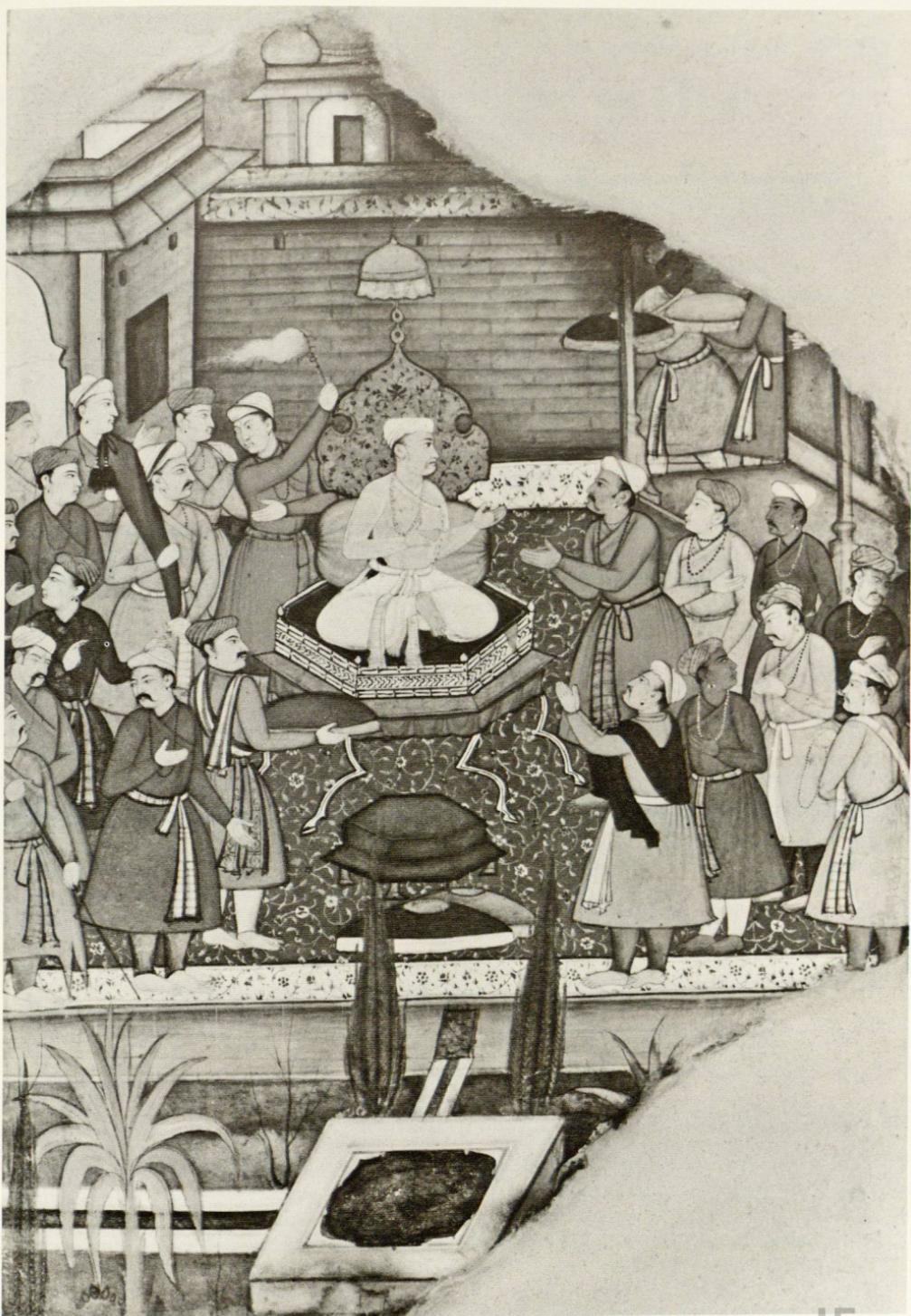
10 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 7 $\frac{1}{8}$  in (26.9 × 19 cm) irregular edges.

The well-known series to which this painting and the following example (cat. no.7) originally belonged appeared on the Indian art market in 1956 and was published shortly thereafter by Pramod Chandra, when 24 examples from it were acquired by three separate Indian museums (*A Series of Ramayana Paintings of the Popular Mughal School*, Bulletin of the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, no.6, 1957–59, pp.64–70). All the paintings from the series were damaged by fire. This probably occurred soon after the paintings were made, since the restored areas, filling the irregular edges of some of them, are fairly close in style to the original work. Fortunately, the inventiveness of composition, the rich and vivid palette, the vivacity of expression and vigorous drawing style – all characteristic features of the series as a whole – were little affected by the damage. Restoration of irregular edges, which was necessary in some folios, is not present in either this work or cat. no.7.

*The Ramayana*, or *Tales of Rama*, which provides the text and from which the lengthy Sanskrit inscriptions on the back of each painting derive, is one of the great epics of Hindu India. Written circa 500 B.C. by the almost legendary Valmiki, this vast work in 24,000 couplets recounts the adventures of Rama, seventh incarnation of Vishnu, in quest of his wife Sita, who had been abducted by the demon Ravana, king of Lanka (Ceylon). The text was always a favourite source of subjects for painters.

The present painting illustrates an early incident from the story (Book II, chapter 2 in Shastri's English translation, London, 1962; although the inscription in mediaeval Hindi on the *verso* of the painting, which perhaps summarizes a different Sanskrit version, places the scene in the final chapter of Book I). King Dasaratha, at the close of his long life, wanted to see his son Rama crowned king or regent. He therefore called together the principal inhabitants of town and country and various neighbouring kings to debate the wisdom of his plan. When Dasaratha appeared before them and sat in his throne like the 'God of a Thousand Eyes amidst the Immortals', the assembly unanimously affirmed his wisdom and besought Dasaratha to make Rama their regent. Although the fine artist who painted this picture was treating a subject from the legendary past, his model for Dasaratha and the splendours of his court were clearly based on contemporary representations of the emperor Akbar and scenes of Mughal assemblies, to which this painting in colour and composition is very close.

Other paintings from the same series are illustrated in M. C. Beach et al., *The Arts of India and Nepal: the Nasli and Alice Heeramanneck Collection*, Boston, 1966, Nos.211a–b; and M. C. Beach, *The Imperial Image; Paintings from the Mughal Court*, Washington, 1981, fig. 18, p.130.



## 7 Rama, Lakshmana and Sita in Panchavati

Illustration to the *Ramayana*

Mughal, sub-imperial style, circa 1595

Opaque watercolour on paper, heightened with gold

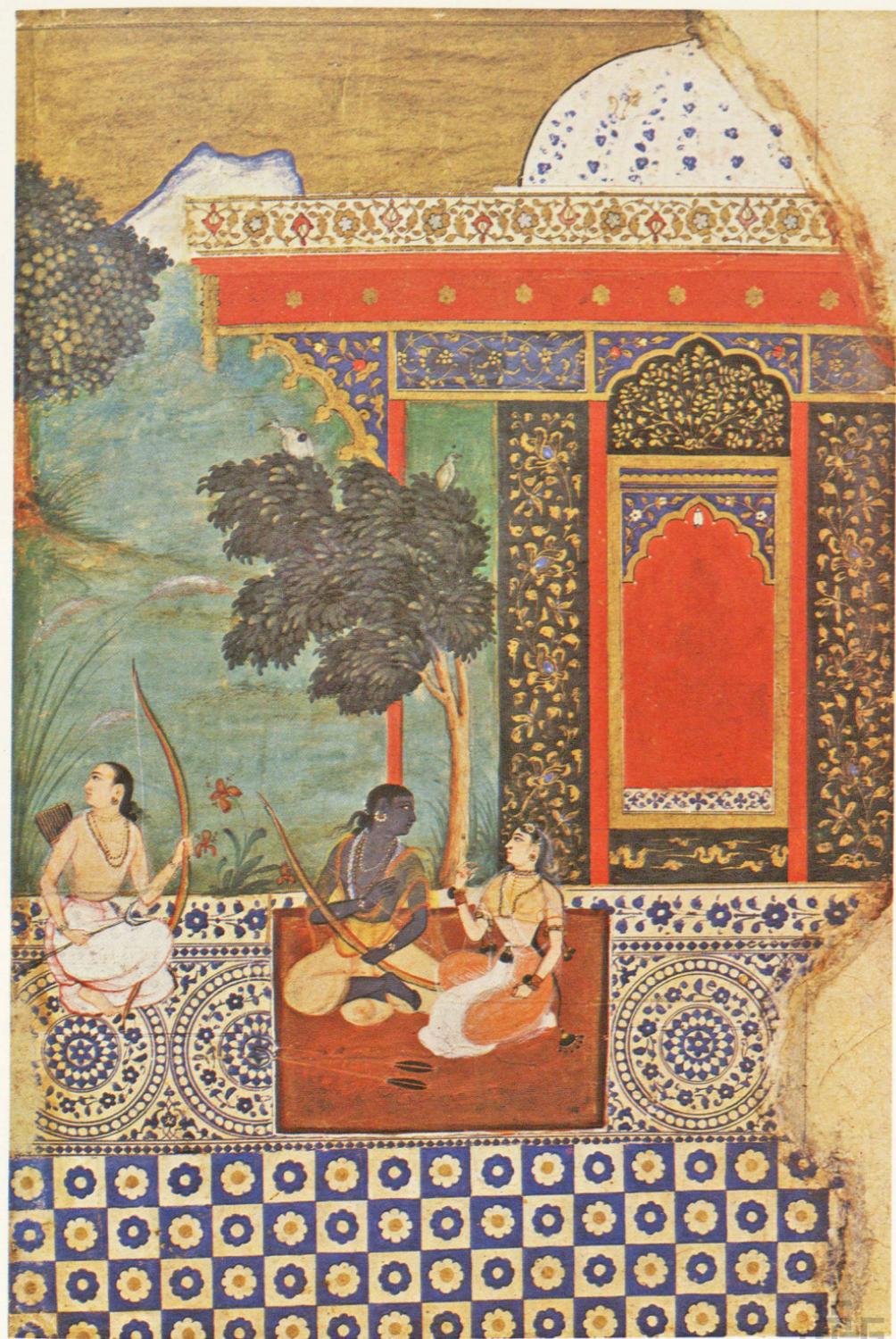
Inscribed on the verso with fifteen lines of Sanskrit text, and a one line summary in mediaeval Hindi

11½×7½ in (28.6×19.1 cm) irregular edges.

This painting and the preceding example (cat. no.6) from the same *Ramayana* series, are painted in a style usually called 'sub-imperial', meaning that they were made for the Mughal gentry, rather than for the emperor or members of his immediate family, by artists working in a simplified, or poetized, variant of the imperial manner. Indian paintings in a Mughal, yet non-imperial, style encompass a vast body of material ranging in style from works like the present examples, which are extremely close to the imperial norm, to far more distant reflections painted by provincials, who had only a nodding acquaintance with the technical standards and pictorial fashions prevailing at court. At the outer fringe, the style is often aptly known as 'Popular Mughal'. In its varying forms and levels of quality, the popular, or sub-imperial, mode was gradually assimilated throughout India by artists working in non-Mughal, indigenous traditions which had become enfeebled by the late 16th and early 17th centuries. In this way Indian painting as a whole was infused with the more naturalistic and humanistic values which the Mughals had been the first to pioneer.

Akbar's sympathy for Hinduism and his policy of encouraging understanding between Muslims and Hindus caused him to commission illustrated translations of the major Hindu epics (S. C. Welch, *The Art of Mughal India*, New York, 1963, p.28). His copies of the *Ramayana* (reputedly now in the City Palace Museum, Jaipur, but never published) and the *Mahabharata* (or *Razm-Nama*, in the same collection), containing hundreds of illustrations and dating from the 1580s, are among the most splendid of Mughal works. However, the highly naturalistic style in which they are painted is often at odds with the inherent fantasy of Hindu myth. A naturalistic representation of a multi-headed, multi-armed god or demon is scarcely possible! It is therefore in a group of less highly detailed and more poetized works, all in a sub-imperial style, that one finds perhaps a more fitting and sympathetic Mughal response to Hindu legend. In this group, we include a complete *Ramayana* manuscript, dating 1587–98, with 130 illustrations, now in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (see M. C. Beach, *The Imperial Image: Paintings for the Mughal Court*, Washington, 1981 no.15a–q, pp.128–55), the dispersed pages from the *Ramayana* series catalogued here (Beach's date for these is circa 1595) and the dispersed paintings in a somewhat cruder style from a well-known *Razm-Nama* manuscript dated 1616.

The painting illustrated here is taken from Book III (*Aranya Kanda*) chapter 15 of the *Ramayana*. As a result of an intrigue by his mother-in-law Kaikeyi, Rama, seventh incarnation of Vishnu and heir to the throne of Ayodhya, was banished from his kingdom for fourteen years. He wandered for some time in a distant



forest, with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana, until he encountered Agastya, who was the foremost of sages. At the latter's advice, the celestial trio journeyed to Panchavati where they finally took up their abode. They are shown here (Rama is, of course, blue) seated before the retreat which Lakshmana built for them near a favoured spot – an enchanting woodland with lovely hills abounding in every kind of flower and bird. The text describes Lakshmana's retreat as a thatched hut with walls of mud, supported by strong stakes of bamboo. The artist of the present work, however, would have none of that! Ignoring the text's meagre specifications, he depicts an elegant building of such abstract poetry that it serves as an emblem of grace. Another largely architectural scene from the same series and by the same hand is in the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi.

## 8 A Leather Binding decorated with Flowers and Insects

Mughal, early 17th century

Stamped leather heightened with gold and colours

Recto: a rectangular central panel decorated with plants, insects and a frog; and around the borders, two rows of alternating medallions and cartouches decorated with floral arabesques

Verso: a rectangular central panel decorated with gilt leather filigree on orange, blue, black and green; and around the borders, a row of alternating medallions and cartouches in the same technique

12½×8½ in (31.6×20.8 cm)

Provenance

Gaston Migeon, Paris

Literature

J. Soustiel, *Objets d'Art de l'Islam*, Paris, 1974, pp.14–15, no.10 (reproduced in colour)

R. H. Pinder-Wilson, *Paintings from the Muslim Courts of India*, London, British Museum, 1976, p.64, no.96

This stamped leather binding is included in an exhibition of paintings because of its remarkable pictorial qualities. The central panel is a landscape in close-up. Among the flowering plants, beneath a suggestion of a cloudy sky, are several small creatures in hot pursuit – a dragonfly, two beetles, a fly, a scorpion, a moth and, in the foreground, a predatory frog.

This subject is rare, if not unique, in book-binding decoration.



## 9 The Building of Alexander's Iron Rampart

Illustration to a *Shah-Nama* Manuscript

By Mushfiq

Mughal, dated 1610–11 (1019 A.H.)

Opaque watercolour on paper heightened with gold and silver  
5½×4¾ in (15×11.6 cm).

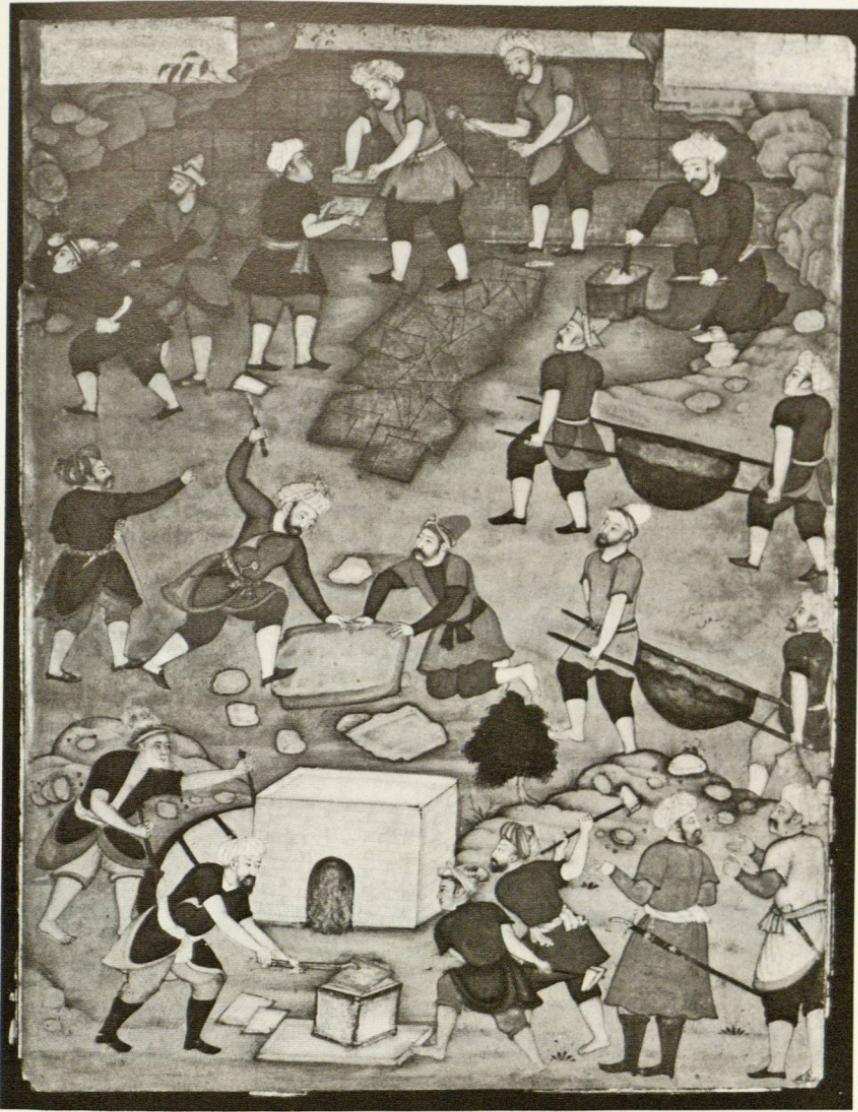
Signed in Persian: 'Amal-i Mushfiq/1019'

Alexander's conquests brought him close to the furthest borders of civilization. The local population lived in fear of the wild people beyond – the savages of Gog and Magog, inhuman beasts, with black tongues and teeth, like wild boars. For the protection of the civilized world he built a huge iron rampart, a bulwark of defence against the barbarian hordes. In this brilliantly coloured miniature, workmen from all over the world, represented by different hats and dress, cut large blocks of green stone and prepare with hammers, tongs and bellows the molten metal (for which the artist has here used silver) for Alexander's wall.

Jahangir (r. 1605–27) did not share the taste for the vast, historic, religious, and scientific manuscripts, illustrated with hundreds of miniatures, which occupied pride of place in the great library assembled by his father Akbar (cat. nos. 1, 4). His own taste inclined towards the small and exquisite. Perhaps feeling that he had already inherited more than enough books, Jahangir commissioned only a relatively small number. When compared to the Akbari norm, his books are smaller in size and have fewer and finer illustrations. The present painting is a characteristic example of the type of illustration which Jahangir admired. The colours have a jewel-like intensity: they are made from malachite, lapis lazuli, silver and gold. The treatment overall reminds one of Laurence Binyon's felicitous remark that Jahangir was 'pleased above all with fine workmanship, voluptuously appreciative of it, . . . having the sense of possession exquisite in the fingertips.' (*Court Painters of the Grand Moguls*, London, 1921, p. 50).

The now-dispersed *Shah-Nama* manuscript, from which this fine illustration was detached, belongs to a small, yet important, group of literary texts dating from the opening years of Jahangir's reign. The paintings from this manuscript, and those from a *Kulliyat* of Sa'di of circa 1604 (formerly Bute collection; numerous illustrations), a *Bustan* of Sa'di of 1605 (formerly Rothschild collection; 26 illustrations), and an *Anwar-i-Suhaili* manuscript of 1604–10 (British Library, 36 illustrations), are all directly related in style, technique, and format. Many of the illustrations in these manuscripts were painted by the same group of artists. The fact that the present painting is dated (1019 A.H./1610–11 A.D.) is of particular interest, since none of the five other known illustrations from the dispersed *Shah-Nama* have dates. (See T. Falk et al, *Persian and Mughal Art*, P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., London, 1976, nos. 88 i–ii; J. Strzygowski, *Asiatische Miniaturenmalerei im Anschluss an Wesen und Werden der Mogulmalerei*, Klagenfurt, 1933, plate 84, fig. 225; Sotheby & Co., London, Dec. 7, 1971, lots 55, 188A.)





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The painter of the present work, **Mushfiq** (fl. 1590–1617), spent most of his career in service to the commander-in-chief of the Mughal armies, the Kahn Khanan, who was a great bibliophile and patron of the arts. According to a contemporary, writing in 1617, *Mushfiq* ‘is an unrivalled painter of his age. . . . He has no equal (in his art). He leads a life of comfort, under the patronage of the Khan Khanan.’ (quoted in M. C. Beach, *The Imperial Image; Paintings for the Mughal Court*, Washington, 1981, p. 143; see the same for a discussion of *Mushfiq*’s career, and for illustrations of his three other known signed works, pp. 142–5, no. 15h, figs. 26–28.)



## 10 The Emperor Jahangir with a Falcon

Attributed to Abu'l Hasan 'Nadir-al-Zaman'

Mughal, *circa* 1620

Drawing in brush and ink, heightened with colour

7 $\frac{1}{16}$ ×3 $\frac{3}{8}$  in (18×9.8 cm)

Verso: calligraphy by Mir Ali

Iranian, early 16th century.

8 $\frac{7}{8}$ ×5 $\frac{1}{8}$  in (21.5×13 cm)

Lent by a private collector, New York

This previously unpublished portrait of Jahangir (r. 1605–1627), wastrel son of Akbar the Great, was drawn from life when the emperor was about fifty-one. His appearance changed remarkably over the course of his twenty-two-year reign. One can almost follow the year by year consequences of his heedless, emotional inner life in the portraits recording his outward appearance. He looks much healthier here than perhaps ever before; but then by this date he had learned to control his taste for wine and opium. By contrast, the numerous portraits of Jahangir's father, Akbar, as they appear in the lavishly illustrated histories which he commissioned, are curiously generalized and inexpressive. While Jahangir had only a fraction of Akbar's genius – wisely entrusting the affairs of government to a talented and powerful wife – in the quality and inspirational nature of his patronage he was easily Akbar's match. He certainly had a more intimate, and perhaps more dependent, relationship with his court painters, whose ranks were thinned to the small number Jahangir truly admired. Moreover, the portraits they made of him, apart from official portraits to be given away, were invariably penetrating, sympathetic and, when he was caught in an unguarded moment as here, even touching.

We attribute this portrait to Abu'l Hasan (1588/89–c.1630), styled Nadir-al-Zaman, (The Wonder of the Age), who was perhaps Jahangir's greatest and most famous painter. He was raised in Jahangir's household and, as the emperor tells us in his entertaining memoirs, Jahangir watched over and encouraged his protégé from the artist's earliest age. Perhaps in these circumstances one should not be surprised at the portrait's subtle characterization; but the interpretation of personality was in any case 'the focus of Abu'l Hasan's interest in all his authentic works' (M. C. Beach, *The Imperial Image: Paintings for the Mughal Court*, Washington, 1981, p.179). Our attribution becomes obvious if one compares the present portrait with the famous picture by Abu'l Hasan dating from roughly the same period, now in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., *Jahangir embracing Shah Abbas* (*ibid*, pp.31, 74, and detail, p.180). The three-dimensional modelling of face and jowl, the delineation of hair, beard and turban, the swinging, sinuous contour of body and stomach and the hooded, pained eye are all traits which only Abu'l Hasan would have rendered in this particular way.

For a discussion of Abu'l Hasan's career and known work see A. K. Das, *Mughal Painting During Jahangir's Time*, Calcutta, 1978; and M. C. Beach, *The Grand Mogul: Imperial Painting in India*, Williamstown, 1978, pp.86–92.

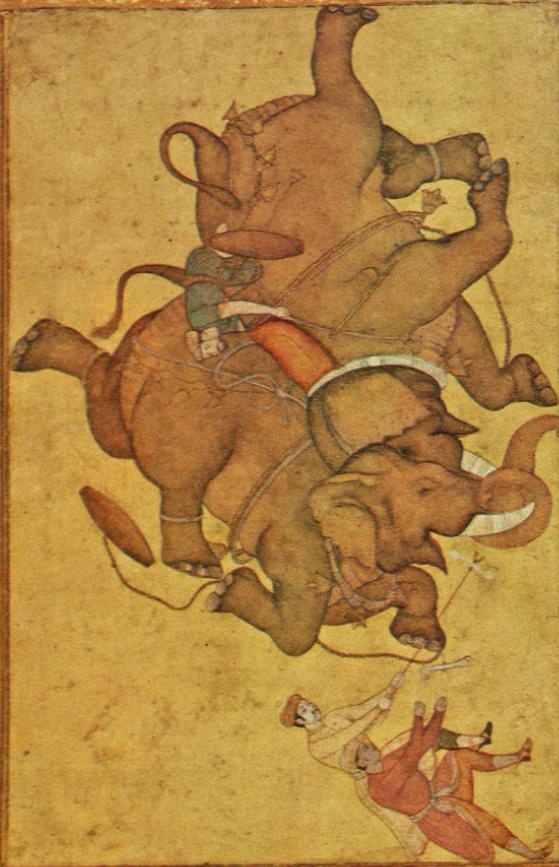




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## 11 An Elephant Combat

Mughal, *circa* 1610

Drawing in brush and ink, heightened with colour and gold

Mounted on an album page of the late 17th century, decorated with floral arabesques in gold and colour

Drawing:  $5\frac{5}{8} \times 8\frac{1}{16}$  in (14.3×22.1 cm)

Folio:  $9\frac{5}{16} \times 15\frac{1}{4}$  in (25.2×38.7 cm)

This rollicking study of two elephants fighting is executed in a technique which was popular with Mughal artists in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Being neither paintings nor drawings, works of this type defy normal categorization. In the present work, while the elephants are drawn in brush and ink, the figures and other subsidiary details are fully painted in colour. The result is a happy compromise between the clarity and finish of a painting, and the freedom and spontaneity of a drawing. The Mughal emperors for whom studies of this type were made clearly viewed them with favour since, unlike preparatory drawings and other unfinished works, they were often mounted in richly decorated borders, as here, and kept in lavish albums.

The spirited animation of this folio reminds one that the 'painted drawing' technique (often called *nim kalam*) was ideally suited to studies of movement and dynamic force. For an illustration of a comparable subject in a closely related technique, see cat. no.13.

## 12 A Nandi Bull and four Deer

By Payag

Mughal, *circa* 1610–20

Opaque watercolour on paper heightened with gold

Mounted on a card; narrow blue and gold margins

Folio:  $11\frac{1}{16} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$  in (4.7×15.9 cm)

Provenance

Sevadjian Collection, Paris

Signed in Persian:

Amal-i Payag (the work of Payag)

This study of a complacent Nandi bull shows the close observation and sensitivity of line, tone and colour, for which animal studies dating from the reign of Jahangir are famous. Jahangir, the fourth Mughal emperor, was a dedicated amateur naturalist as well as an inspired patron; the animal studies which he commissioned reflect a balanced approach to art and science. His attitude to nature, as to all his other interests, 'combined a strong aesthetic response. . . . with an obsessive desire to dissect, analyze and record'. (B. Gascoigne, *The Great Moghuls*, New York, 1971, p.131)

The present study was painted by Payag (fl. 1590–1655), who was one of Jahangir's finest artists. It has been mounted between two smaller studies of paired deer that were probably painted by a different hand. Their small size and unusual

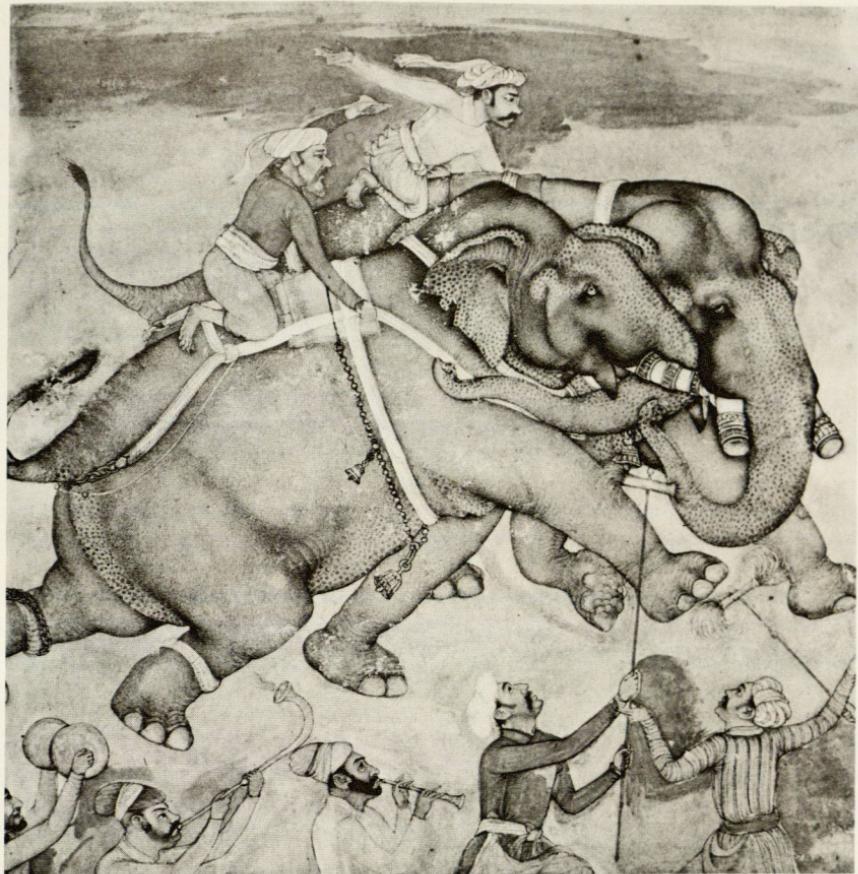


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arrangement are explained by the fact that the narrow strip of paper on which all three studies have been mounted is actually the top edge of a remarkable album page which is no longer intact. This album page was originally published by S. C. Welch in 1963 (*Mughal and Deccani Miniature Paintings from a Private Collection*, Ars Orientalis, vol. V, pp.221–33, fig. 15). It once contained three major animal studies and eleven smaller works which had been assembled from disparate sources and mounted together in the early 17th century. In addition to Payag's study (trimmed from the top of the page prior to 1963 and not published by Welch), the original folio also contained two other major works: the well-known study of a *Wounded Buck* of circa 1615–20, attributed to Abu'l Hasan, mounted at the centre of the page and the equally well-known *Tibetan Yak* of circa 1610–15, likewise attributed to Abu'l Hasan (see cat. no.10), which was mounted beneath it. Various smaller paintings of nilgai, ibexes, sheep and deer filled the margins to either side of these larger studies. (The original folio measured 36.1×15.9 cm). Although both the *Wounded Buck* and *Tibetan Yak* have been attributed to a famous painter (see S. C. Welch, *A Flower from every Meadow*, New York, 1973, no.61; and M. C. Beach, *The Grand Mogul*, Williams-town, 1978, pp.92, 171), neither work is actually signed. The present study from the same album page is of particular interest because the Nandi bull is actually signed 'amal-i Payag' (the work of Payag). For Payag's career and major works, see M. C. Beach, op. cit., pp.151–54.

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### 13 Two Fighting Elephants

Mughal, *circa* 1630

Opaque watercolour on paper, heightened with gold

Trimmed on the right and left margins

Narrow margins illuminated with gold

Painting: 7 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 7 in (18.5 x 18 cm)

Folio: 8 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 7 in (22.5 x 18 cm)

Inscription in Persian on verso: 'The image of fighting elephants'

Also on verso: five seals of ownership, including a seal of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1627-58) dated 1042 A.H. (1632-33 A.D.); a seal of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, or Alamgir (r. 1658-1707); and three additional, but illegible, seals.

Watching fights between animals, such as elephants (see cat. no.11) and camels (see cat. no.16), was a favourite pastime of the Mughal emperors. The French



traveller François Bernier, who was in India from 1656 to 1668, once described an elephant combat as it might have been arranged at the Mughal court:

A wall of earth is raised three or four feet wide and five or six high. The two ponderous beasts meet one another face to face, each having a couple of riders.... The riders animate the elephants either by soothing words, or by chiding them as cowards, and urge them on with their heels, until the poor creatures approach the wall and are brought to the attack. The shock is tremendous, and it appears surprising that they ever survive the dreadful wounds and blows inflicted with their teeth, their heads, and their trunks.... the mud wall at length thrown down, the stronger or more courageous elephant passes on and attacks his opponent and, putting him to flight, pursues and fastens on him with such obstinacy that the animals can be separated only by means of *cherkys*, or fireworks, which are made to explode between them. (*Travels in the Mogul Empire*, ed. A. Constable, London, 1891, pp.278-79).

The dramatic conclusion of Bernier's account might have been illustrated at an earlier date by the remarkable painted sketch reproduced here. The work is drawn in thin, tan washes known as *nim kalam*, and heightened with broad touches of colour which are worked to a high level of finish in certain crucial areas. The stamp on the *verso* dated 1632-33 establishes the *terminus ante quem*. As a work of the early Shah Jahan period, this study is remarkable for its freedom of movement and execution, and for the light-hearted tone. Bernier's 'ponderous beasts' were unfortunate creatures, yet these elephants appear to be happy and to feel no pain.

Another painting by the same spirited artist and inscribed with a Shah Jahani seal dated 1648 is in a private collection, Cambridge, (Mass.). For a related Mughal work from the Chester Beatty *Akbar-Nama* of circa 1604, see T. W. Arnold and J. V. S. Wilkinson, *A Catalogue of the Indian Miniatures in the Library of A. Chester Beatty*, London, 1933, vol. II, plate 15.



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#### 14 Portrait of a Mughal Officer

Mughal, circa 1650–60

Drawing in ink and brush, heightened with coloured washes  
 $16\frac{1}{4} \times 12\frac{1}{8}$  in (42.6 × 31.3 cm)

Inscribed in Hindi:

'Iltaphti Khan Amir Syah Jahani'  
'Iltaphti Khan, an officer of Shah Jahan'

The Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1627–58) delighted in precious stones, as his father Jahangir had done in paintings. (S. C. Welch, *The Art of Mughal India*, New



York, 1963, p.101). Goldsmiths and lapidaries flourished in his reign, as did architects – it was Shah Jahan who built the Taj Mahal. Painters, on the other hand, were less happily affected by the new emperor's cold, formal aesthetic. During his reign one begins to see in their work a shift from naturalness, dynamism and psychological insight to a new and obsessive concern with perfection of technique and minuteness of detail. The results were often splendid, yet they are as glacially hard as the precious stones which Shah Jahan so admired.

This portrait drawn from life has something of the patrician *sang-froid* which characterizes the arts during Shah Jahan's reign – note the fastidious lips and emphasis on fine bone structure. It was probably made as a preparatory study for one of those scenes of formal receptions (*durbars*) which are among the most common types of court painting during the mid-17th century. In these hierarchical scenes of court life, the emperor is generally shown seated on his jewel-encrusted Peacock Throne while his court stands arrayed beneath him in descending order of rank. As many as fifty nobles were included in paintings of this kind; and the features of each were a faithful likeness – the result of individual portrait studies of the type illustrated here. Few of these preparatory studies have survived and even fewer of them are as large as the present example. Shah Jahan would probably not have looked at this drawing more than once. In its unfinished state, preserving the process and second thoughts of the artist, and in its immediacy and truth to life, he might have found it rude and somewhat disquieting. Today, for these very reasons, we consider it to be one of the finer drawings of its period.

## 15 Equestrian Portrait of Crown Prince Shah Alam

Attributed to Hunhar

Mughal, circa 1680

Opaque watercolour on paper heightened with gold

Mounted on a russet-coloured border with gold rules

Painting:  $14\frac{1}{16} \times 10\frac{1}{4}$  in (37.9  $\times$  27.4 cm)

Folio:  $17\frac{1}{2} \times 12\frac{1}{16}$  in (44.4  $\times$  32 cm)

Inscribed on the verso in Persian:

*Taswire padsiyah zadeh Shah Alam Bahadur  
vaqt ki ke dar Aurangabad subhehdar budand  
dar juwaniye tasvir anwaqt/Amal Musawwar Hunhar*

Inscribed on the verso in Hindi:

*Patsyah jada Syah Alam Bahadur jab Aurangabad ka suba hai:  
jawani main tabki tasvir hai/Musawwar Haunhar/1/Shri*

The meaning of the two inscriptions is identical:

'A picture of Crown Prince Shah Alam Bahadur while he was the *subahdar* (governor) of Aurangabad: portrait made during his youth/Painter: Hunhar'

Aurangzeb ruled for forty-nine years (1658–1707) and had four sons. The heir apparent Muhammad Mu'azzam (1643–1712), who is portrayed in this painting, eventually succeeded his father at the age of sixty-four. During Aurangzeb's lifetime, Muhammad Mu'azzam was called by two different names. Aurangzeb

gave him the title Shah Alam as a special mark of favour in 1676. Again as a mark of favour and to amend for a period of wrongful disgrace, he was renamed Bahadur Shah in 1695; it was under this title that he ruled as emperor when he finally ascended the throne in 1707. His contemporaries concurred that he was pious, kind, of equable temperament and generous to a fault. He was not a great king, but his brief five-year reign was at least a time of general peace and prosperity. Sadly, one can hardly make a similar claim for any of Bahadur Shah's successors. With his death in 1712 began the long process of Mughal decline. The last Mughal emperor was finally deposed by the British in 1857; by that time the empire had dwindled to little more than the city of Delhi.

In 1680, the approximate date of this painting, the Mughal empire was at the zenith of its power and wealth. In this portrait, which symbolizes Mughal confidence and self-regard, Shah Alam is portrayed as a man in early middle age. If the painting is a contemporary likeness, as we believe it is, we can judge its approximate date. The Persian and Hindi inscriptions on the *verso* further help to narrow the margin of error: 'A portrait of Crown Prince Shah Alam Bahadur while he was the *subahdar* (governor) of Aurangabad: portrait made during his youth/Painter: Hunhar.' Prince Shah Alam occupied this post from 1667 to 1683, notwithstanding short interruptions of tenure when imperial service required him elsewhere. Assuming that the inscription is reliable, historical evidence suggests 1683 as the *terminus ante quem*, when Shah Alam was forty years old. In 1695, according to a contemporary European account, Shah Alam had by the age of fifty-two become fat and his beard grey. (W. Irvine, *Later Mughals*, (Indian reprint), New Delhi, 1971, p.137.) Even at the age of forty, one is no longer a youth ('portrait made during his youth'), so a date somewhat earlier than 1683 is probable.

Since inscriptions on Indian paintings are notoriously unreliable, one ought to examine with particular care the merits of the present example. First of all, it is important to note that the inscription's retrospective tone suggests that it was not written at the time when the portrait was painted. Yet the use of the title 'Crown Prince Shah Alam' suggests that it could not have been written after Shah Alam became king and was styled Emperor Bahadur Shah. Therefore the probable date of the inscription is *circa* 1683–1707, i.e. a date of sufficient proximity to the presumed date of the painting to suggest the writer was a reliable witness.

Significantly, the painting is mounted on a typical Kishangarh border, (see cat. no.28). Since Shah Alam was the son-in-law of the reigning Kishangarh Maharaja, Man Singh (r. 1658–1706), it is not improbable that he presented this portrait to Man Singh himself. When it was mounted, or remounted, at Kishangarh, the information which accompanied it would have been transferred, or neatly recorded for the first time, in a prominent position on the reverse – as here. Kishangarh royal inscriptions of this type are for the most part highly reliable, since the maharajas of this court, who were greatly influenced by the Mughals, shared their mania for accurate records.

For all of these reasons, the attribution to the painter Hunhar, as well as the other information provided by the inscriptions, can be accepted as highly reliable. Hunhar (fl. 1640–90) was, of course, a well-known portrait painter during the reign of Shah Jahan (1627–58). Yet little is known of Shah Jahan's painters after

they came under the supervision of his stern, usurping successor, Aurangzeb. The latter's strict Muslim views on the arts soon led to a total ban on dance, music and painting. Between 1670 and 1680 all of his court painters – the standard bearers of a continuous pictorial tradition which had been nurtured for more than a hundred years – were dismissed. As a result, there was a gradual dispersal of painters from Delhi as they sought employment elsewhere. Some carried the Mughal style to Rajasthan where an interest in painting was kept alive. (The present painting is an important example of the Mughal link with Rajasthan, since one can see how the entire school of Kishangarh painting developed directly from works of this type.) Other painters sought employment with the Mughal nobility, or with other members of the imperial family. It is not surprising that Hunhar, who was one of the more eminent veterans of the *ancien régime*, offered his talents to the heir apparent at Aurangabad.

His painting of Prince Shah Alam adheres to the general features of a type of state portraiture which had evolved during Shah Jahan's reign (see *Acquisitions récentes de toutes époques*, Institut Néerlandais, Paris, 1974, no. 21). Shah Alam is out hunting, with four of his retainers, one of whom holds aloft the prince's personal standard. His rearing horse is silhouetted against a panorama of sky, water, and earth (with a bird's-eye view of a distant fort), beneath a royal emblem, the rising sun.

Although the picture is executed in the thin washes and soft colours which characterize Mughal painting of the later 17th century, its use of allegorical iconography, popular in the previous regime, is none the less clear. (For a painting, or copy of a painting, of roughly the same date, perhaps likewise a portrait of Shah Alam, and with an almost identical iconography, see F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia India and Turkey*, London, 1912, plate 203.)

The present portrait of Shah Alam represents a later stage in the development of Hunhar's style. This had gradually evolved from the brilliantly coloured, enamelled portraits which are his earliest works (see N. M. Titley, *Miniatures from Persian Manuscripts in the British Library and British Museum*, London 1977, no. 395/25, 26, 29, 36, 40, 45, 54; T. W. Arnold and J. V. S. Wilkinson, *A Catalogue of the Indian Miniatures in the Library of A. Chester Beatty*, London, 1933, vol. III, plate 71; P. Brown, *Indian Painting Under the Mughals*, Oxford, 1924, plate XXIX; T. Falk and M. Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library*, London, 1981, no. 93 – all ten portraits cited here date from circa 1640–60). His style progressed to the more schematic, thinly painted, linear quality found in his later works (see A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Indian Drawings*, London 1910, plate XI for the *Four Yogis* of circa 1650; J. Soustiel and M. C. David, *Miniatures de l'Inde – 2*, Paris, 1974, no. 14, for *The Reception of the Persian Ambassador* of circa 1660–70; and T. Falk and M. Archer, *op. cit.*, no. 133, for an equestrian portrait of circa 1690).



16

## 16 Two Camels Fighting

Mughal, late 17th century

Opaque watercolour on paper; the background is only touched with faint washes of colour

Coloured margins speckled with gold

Painting:  $7 \times 9\frac{1}{2}$  in (17.7 x 24 cm)

Folio:  $9\frac{1}{8} \times 11\frac{1}{8}$  in (23.1 x 29 cm)

In much the same way that European artists looked to Italy for classical inspiration, Mughal artists looked to Iran. As a result, the influence of Persian art on Mughal painting is so widespread that even works of the present type, which at first glance seem thoroughly Indian in style and spirit, turn out to have Persian antecedents. The design and composition of this painting hark back, whether consciously or not, to a classical representation of the same subject which was painted by the Persian artist Bihzad in the early 16th century. This great master attained immense prestige during his lifetime. Since his *Two Camels Fighting* was one of his most striking and original works, its design became famous and was often repeated in later Persian and Mughal works. One of Jahangir's painters actually made a copy of it in the year 1608. The present work is only a free adaptation, yet the original source is clear. Bihzad's fighting camels are viewed from the same angle and their configuration is similar. Moreover, as in the present work, they wear silk saddle cloths and are depicted in contrasting shades of dark and light brown. (See Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, London, 1933, plate LXXXVII A). A Persian artist, however, would never have viewed any animal with such deadpan objectivity, nor rendered both its texture and character with such loving care.

For other Mughal adaptations of Bihzad's famous composition, see K. Khan-dalavala, *Mughal Miniatures*, New Delhi, 1955, plate 5; and C. Sivaramamurti, *The Art of India*, New York, 1977 p.422, no.665.





17

## 17 The Book of Dioscorides (*Kitab-i Diasquridus*)

A Persian translation of the *De Materia Medica* of Pedacius Dioscorides, 1st century A.D.

Deccan, Sultanate of Bijapur (?)

Dated September, 1595 (Muharram 1004 A.H.)

176 folios with 15 lines of text in *nasta'liq* script; text incomplete

Approximately 315 separate illustrations of about 550 individual plants and several animals; opaque watercolour on paper

Condition: The manuscript is in poor condition. Each folio is stained over all and the corners are defective. Some of the folios have been cleaned and others have been carefully repaired with modern paper. There are numerous traces of earlier repairs as well; the binding is missing.

Folio: 15% × 10 in (39.7 × 25.3 cm) irregular

The famous Greek botanical manuscript, the *De Materia Medica* of Pedacius Dioscorides (1st century A.D.) – a study of the healing properties of plants – was frequently copied in the Middle Ages, both in the West and the East. A famous early version was copied in the original Greek and illustrated with about four hundred pictures of plants for the Byzantine Princess Juliana Anicia in 512 A.D. (the *Codex Vindobonensis*). Byzantine manuscripts of this type, presumably based on ancient Greek illustrated prototypes which have not survived, later served as models for illustrated Arabic translations from the 11th century onwards. (The most famous Arabic illustrated copy was made at Baghdad in 1224; see R. Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, Lausanne, 1962, pp.114–22.) The present, hitherto unknown, Indian copy of this famous text, dated 1595, is written in

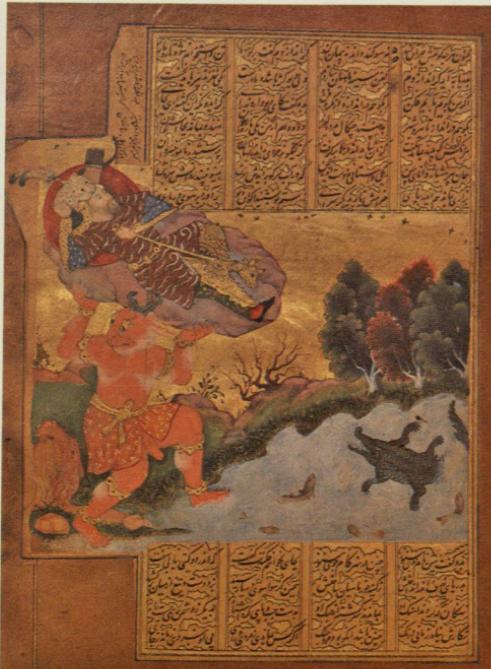


Persian and was presumably translated from an Arabic version, rather than from the original Greek. Although thirteen Arabic illustrated copies of Dioscorides' text have survived (E. Grube, *Muslim Miniature Paintings*, Venice, 1962, p.2), Indian illustrated copies are extremely rare.

The earliest illustrations of Dioscorides' text depict single plants on plain backgrounds, with roots, stems and leaves all clearly drawn. Yet from the 9th century onwards in Byzantine copies, and from the 11th century onwards in Muslim copies, illuminators occasionally appended 'explanatory figures' and other illustrative accretions. These simple studies of single plants gradually expanded into *genre* scenes. The present copy of the text, however, is illustrated in the earlier and purer tradition. There are 176 folios with separate illustrations (totalling 550 individual plants), all painted with an exemplary freedom and feeling for the organic growth of the plant, from the roots to its last tendril. The noted authority Simon Digby has attributed this manuscript, for reasons of language and pictorial style, to the Deccan and, more specifically, to the Sultanate of Bijapur (in a verbal communication). The reigning king of Bijapur in 1595 was Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II (r. 1580–1627), a man of extremely cultured and artistic tastes, who was also famous for his learning. It is therefore not unlikely that this rare Indian illustrated copy of Dioscorides' seminal treatise might have been made for him.



18a



18b

**18a Rustam drags the Khan of Chin from his Elephant****b The Div Akvan bearing Rustam away**

Two illustrated folios from a *Shah-Nama* manuscript

Deccan, Sultanate of Bijapur, circa 1610

Opaque watercolour on paper heightened with gold; margins restored

Persian text in four columns in *nasta'liq* script

Paintings:  $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{3}{8}$  in (9×8.7 cm) irregular

$3\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{1}{8}$  in (9×10.3 cm) irregular

Folios: 8×4½ in (20.3×12.1 cm)

Lent by a private collector, Hong Kong

The lavish, pocket-size book from which these delightful folios were detached belongs to an elite class of court manuscript. These books were made for the personal use of the imperial family alone. The high quality of paintings in manuscripts of this type is often indirectly related to their size. The expectation that these books would actually be read, unlike larger, unwieldy volumes which were rarely opened, must have had a galvanizing influence on the artists who illustrated them. Only a feckless painter would ignore such an opportunity to show off his skill, knowing that his larger work was unlikely to receive such intimate attention.

The two works catalogued here are painted in a style which was influenced by Persian illustrations of the same text – the *Shah-Nama* (The Book of Kings), the national epic of Iran. Indeed, the cool brilliant palette, 'Chinese' cloud scrolls and





distinctive landscape backgrounds recall Persian works of approximately the same date. During this time Mughal paintings were also briefly influenced by the late Safavid style (see cat. no.9). Nevertheless, the Deccani provenance of these lively illustrations is clear. The lavish use of gold and the dark foliage edged with flickering highlights are particularly characteristic of Bijapur painting. They appear in an illustrated manuscript of *circa* 1590–91, as well as in a famous elephant study from Bijapur of approximately the same date (see D. Barrett, 'Painting at Bijapur', *Paintings from Islamic Lands* (R. H. Pinder-Wilson, ed.), Oxford, 1969, pp.142–49; N. C. Mehta, *Studies in Indian Painting*, Bombay, 1926, plate 47).

## 19 Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah of Golconda

Deccan, Sultanate of Golconda, *circa* 1620

Opaque watercolour on paper heightened with gold

Mounted on an early 17th century album page decorated with gold flowers on tan paper; set within later margins on blue paper speckled with gold

Painting: 8½×4½ in (21.1×11.8 cm)

Folio: 15%×10½ in (39.1×27.7 cm)

### Literature

R. H. Pinder-Wilson, *Paintings from the Muslim Courts of India*, London, 1976, no.187.

The painting made for the Sultans of the Deccan, where the great Muslim states of Bijapur, Golconda, and lesser realms flourished from pre-Mughal times until the late 17th century, rivals Mughal painting in quality, range, and originality. Painting really started in the Deccan – on the high, broad plateau of south central India – simultaneously with the Mughal school, i.e. *circa* 1560. Yet, while Mughal paintings exist in good number, Deccani paintings are extremely scarce. (For this the Mughals are largely to blame: when they finally squashed the Deccani sultanates in the late 17th century, the resulting destruction of art works was lamentably thorough.) Furthermore, while the history of 16th and 17th century Mughal painting is by now fairly well understood, the history of Deccani painting remains a subject of heated controversy.

The atmosphere of opulence and the daring colour clashes of black, magenta and orange, to which Deccani painting owes so much of its distinctive flavour, are evident in this brilliant portrait of Muhammad Qutb Shah, Sultan of Golconda (r. 1612–26). The Sultan is wearing the tight-fitting turban, knee-length breeches, and transparent white *jama* and over-mantle, which are typical Deccani fashions, as well as the brocade cross-bands peculiar to Golconda. The details and textures of his dress and ornament are handled with exquisite finish and tactile sense. Indeed, the painting's surface is almost encrusted with jewel-like detail. Yet there is a welcome feeling of movement, a compensating breeze in this hothouse of style and colour which enlivens the impacted surfaces throughout.

One would not have surmised from this portrait that Muhammad Qutb Shah was something of a pious bookworm: he doesn't look the type to have commissioned manuscripts for the royal library at the rate of about 1,000 per year, but so he did (H. K. Sherwani, *History of the Qutb Shahi Dynasty*, New Delhi, 1974, p.400). In

तदा भूमि कुपलातो ह धारातके कुपलातहा सानाता



fact, unlike most Deccani rulers who were easy-going and voluptuous, Sultan Muhammad was serious and self-disciplined. In foreign affairs, he followed a policy of peace and consolidation; while in private moments, he wrote poetry of distinction under the pen-name Zillu'l-lah and pursued a course of study in history, biography, theology and other improving subjects. He died at the age of thirty-three in 1626.

Only one other contemporary likeness of Muhammad Qutb Shah is known: a Mughal work of *circa* 1625, painted by Hashim and inscribed by the Emperor Jahangir (see R. H. Pinder-Wilson, *op. cit.*, no.131). Barrett's identification of Muhammad Qutb Shah as the young prince in a Deccani painting of *circa* 1610–20 (British Museum) remains controversial (D. Barrett, *Painting of the Deccan*, London, 1958, plate 8).

## 20 The Victory at Pragjotisha

Illustration from the Palam *Bhagavata Purana* Series

North India, *circa* 1525

Opaque watercolour on paper; yellow and red margins

Folio: 7×9½ in (17.7×23.2 cm)

### Inscriptions

Recto, in mediaeval Hindi: 'Aditi offers ear-rings/Sa-na-na'

Verso, in Sanskrit: a 15 line eulogy to Vishnu, 'the wearer of vanamala, the greatest of gems, the eternal atman'

The important series from which this painting comes belongs to the so-called *Chaurapanchasika* group of paintings. They were produced in north India during the 16th century in a style which had not yet been influenced by Mughal art. Pre-Mughal Indian painting is notable for its flat patches of colour and economy of form. In painting of this type, the picture space is divided into compartments for clarity of narration. The colour range is limited – only red, yellow, blue or green are generally used – and the figures are organized on a flat plane in frieze-like arrangements which rarely over-lap. This style had originated during the mediaeval period in temple wall paintings and manuscript illustrations dating from the 10th century and earlier. The *Chaurapanchasika* group, including the present folio from the Palam *Bhagavata Purana* series, represents the partial evolution of this mediaeval tradition. At their very best, paintings of this type preserve the rapt, wide-eyed wonder of an age of faith; they likewise anticipate the more personal or psychological treatment of religious themes which gained favour during later years.

The subject of the present painting comes from the *Bhagavata Purana* (The Ancient Story of God) – that vast Hindu epic and chronicle of the great god Vishnu and his numerous incarnations (*avatars*). It illustrates Book X, chapter 59. The ear-rings of Aditi, mother of Indra, Lord of the Clouds, had been stolen by King Naraka who was brazen enough to challenge Indra himself and all the other gods. Naraka ruled from the city of Pragjotisha (shown in schematic representation on the right side of the painting) which he had made impregnable with fortresses of

mountains, weapons, water, fire and wind. Vishnu (Krishna) ascended on Garuda, the mythical bird which was his mount, and in the company of his spouse Satyabhama, 'like clouds accompanied by lightning above the sun', they arrived at the city of Pragjotisha. They shattered the city's defences, slew its soldiers and demon defenders and dealt Naraka his just reward. This painting represents their final victory in a highly conceptual manner – note the exultant floral arabesque! Naraka is already dead. On the right, his mother Bhumi (the Earth) is seated in Naraka's palace with her grandson, who is sorely afraid. On the left, they return Aditi's ear-rings to Vishnu and present him with a garland and a 'mighty precious jewel'. They receive the god's forgiveness as they hymn his praise.

A painting from the same series, which is extremely close in style and composition to the present work, is now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (see M. C. Beach et al, *The Arts of India and Nepal: the Nasli and Alice Heeramanneck Collection*, Boston, 1966, p.101, no.146a).

## 21 Rama and Sita Enthroned

Illustration from a *Vishnu Avatara* series

Rajasthan, Bikaner School, circa 1650

Opaque watercolour on paper heightened with gold; modern tan margins

Painting (including inscription): 10½×7¾ in (26.1×18.8 cm)

### Inscriptions

Recto: A three line *sloka* in Sanskrit, an invocation to Rama, 'scion of the Raghu clan'.

Verso: a five line poem in Hindi by Nijudas Bhau extolling the fraternal harmony of Rama and his three brothers.

Rama, seventh incarnation of Vishnu and personification of righteousness and virtue, is seated with Sita his wife on a gold *gadi* in a palace throne-room. He is attended by his three brothers: Lakshmana holding a *chauri* (fly-whisk), Bharata holding a sheathed sword and Shatrughna holding a gold box. The monkey chief Hanuman, who had assisted Rama in quelling the demon Ravana, is standing before them in an attitude of reverence (*namaskara mudra*).

In composition, this painting is extremely close to Mughal scenes of formal court receptions (*durbars*) dating from the reign of Shah Jahan (r. 1627–58). The arrangement of textiles and the architectural elements are particularly evocative of Mughal a source. During the reign of Maharaja Karan Singh (r. 1631–69), Bikaner painters were strongly influenced by Mughal art (see cat. no.23), yet they were not slavish imitators. Having absorbed the principles of Mughal painting, they developed them as the basis for their own highly original and creative style. Thus, in this work, the Bikaner artist has exploited the principles of Mughal painting for his own purpose. In a highly original transmutation, Rama has become a Mughal lord, a Universal Monarch, and Hanuman is his *diwan* (prime minister).

For a Bikaner painting of the same period and theme, painted by Ali Raza, *The Master Artist from Delhi*, see K. Khandalavala et al, *Miniature Paintings from the Sri Motichand Khanjachi Collection*, New Delhi, 1960, plate E.

॥४८॥ श्रीमान्नीलांबुदानः सरास्तजनयनः काहिकोदड्यारी सद्गुणाद्वायेतोगस्ताङ्गम्  
रमणाजानकीवामनागे ॥ द्युम्पाप्यज्ञानिवद्वंजलिरपिहत्युमान्ते क्षेत्रान्तरेव्यात्पृथि  
सिंहसमंतज्जितद्वुजकुलाश्ववेद्वामहान्मा ॥



## 22 Vishnu appears to Dhruva

Illustration from a *Vishnu Avatara* series

Rajasthan, Bikaner School, circa 1650

Opaque watercolour on paper; modern tan margins

Painting (including inscriptions): 10×7½ in (25.4×18.4 cm)

### Inscriptions

Recto, a three line *sloka* in Sanskrit: 'A vision of a friend with a heroically awesome form, yet one compassionate like a father. Resplendent with noble and truthful deeds, he welcomes those seeking sanctuary in his shadow. Prithvi Singh, the learned, who is such a seeker, has stationed himself like Dhruva at (Vishnu's) feet.'

Verso, a six line inscription in Hindi: an invocation to Vishnu, 'The remover of obstacles, the saviour of mankind'

Dhruva (firm, constant, fixed) was the son of King Uttanapada and the grandson of Mani, the progenitor of present-day mankind. His youth was bedevilled by a step-mother, Suruci, Uttanapada's favourite wife. One day, after Suruci insulted Dhruva in the presence of his father, who remained silent, he left the palace and travelled to the forest of Madhuvana, as depicted in this painting. Here he started practising austerities in devotion to the god Vishnu, who alone might comfort his broken heart. Vishnu eventually appeared to Dhruva:

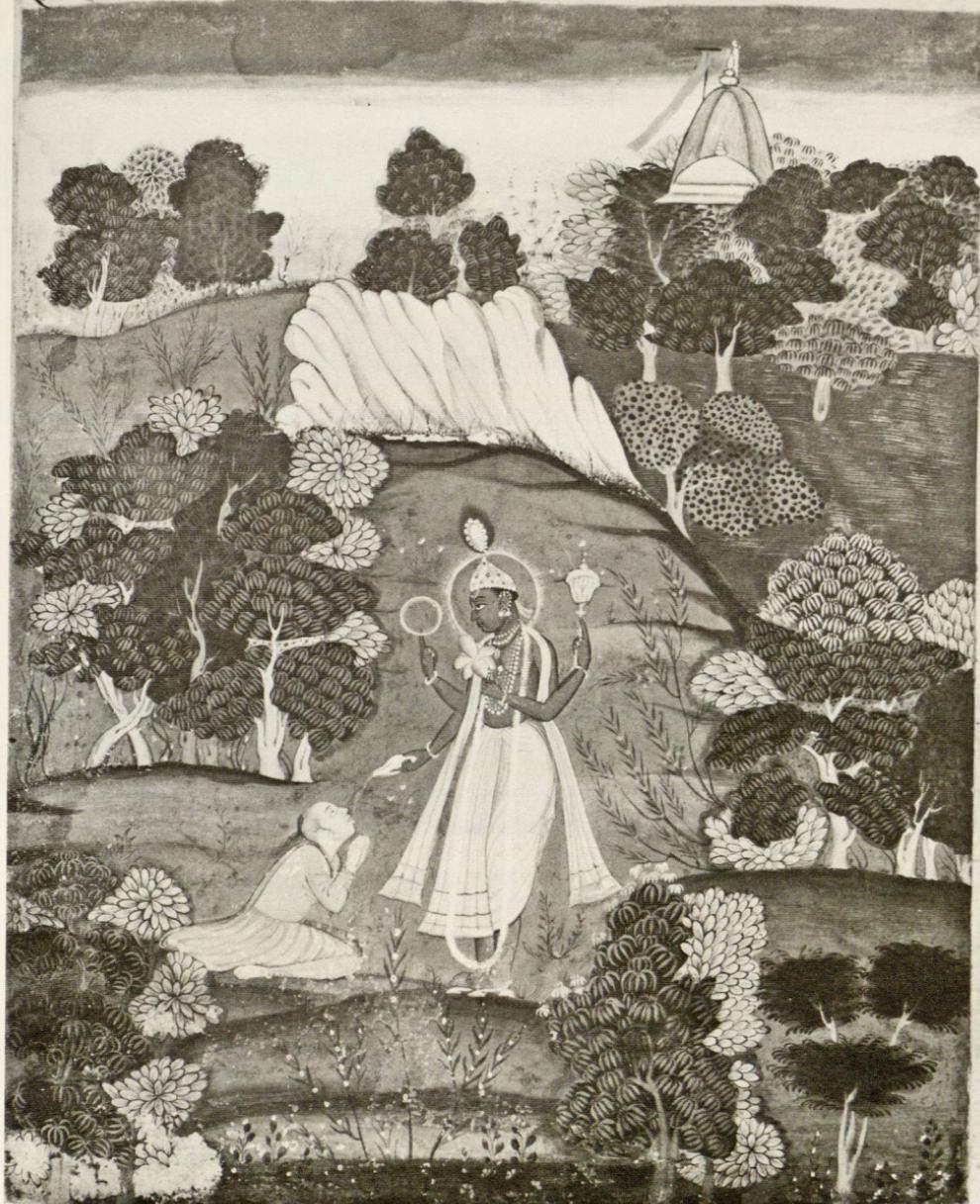
Awed at his presence, the child bowed to him, bending down his body and prostrating himself before him like a stick. . . . (Vishnu) who dwells in the heart of Dhruva as well as those of others, knew that the child which folded its palms before him, desired to praise him, but did not know how to express himself. Out of grace, he touched him on the cheek with his conch, the embodiment of the Veda. Immediately (at the touch of Vishnu's conch) Dhruva whose eternal abode was reserved, was inspired, with the divine speech and realized decisively the real nature of the Supreme Soul. . . . Being full of devotion and love, he calmly (and without faltering) began to praise the Lord whose great glory is heard everywhere. (*Bhagavata Purana*, Book IV, chapter 9).

Dhruva later became king of the earth, and rising to heaven, has now become the Pole Star (A. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, New York, 1964, p.186).

This subject is rare in Indian painting. For another example from this same fine series, see cat no.21. The nobleman Prithvi Singh, mentioned in the painting's two line Sanskrit superscription, is perhaps the Thakur of Bhukarka, the Bikaner courtier who was active during the opening decades of the 18th century. (K. Singh, *The Relations of the House of Bikaner with the Central Powers*, New Delhi, 1974, p.96, 101). If this identification is correct, then the inscription in which he is named is clearly a subsequent addition since, for stylistic reasons, the painting itself could not possibly date from this later period.

स्त्रीक् भिन्नं भानुवचः शरो विरल सत्यं रा राज्यमुनः प्राज्यवशरलागतकद्वाला  
यासंस्येष्यवः कं बुना॥ स्थानेस्थापितवान् द्वूवेद्वुभदोपुण्यमुनोत्तं पुरः पृथ्वीसि  
हमहाशायं समवतात्सः पृथ्विण्योहसि॥

ब



## 23 Portrait of the Elephant Ghughli

By Chotarmal

Rajasthan, Bikaner School, *circa* 1660

Drawing in brush and ink, heightened with colour

Mounted on an album page with tan margins

Drawing: 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ ×13 in (26×32.8 cm)

Folio: 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ ×13 $\frac{1}{8}$  in (27.7×35.3 cm)

### Inscriptions

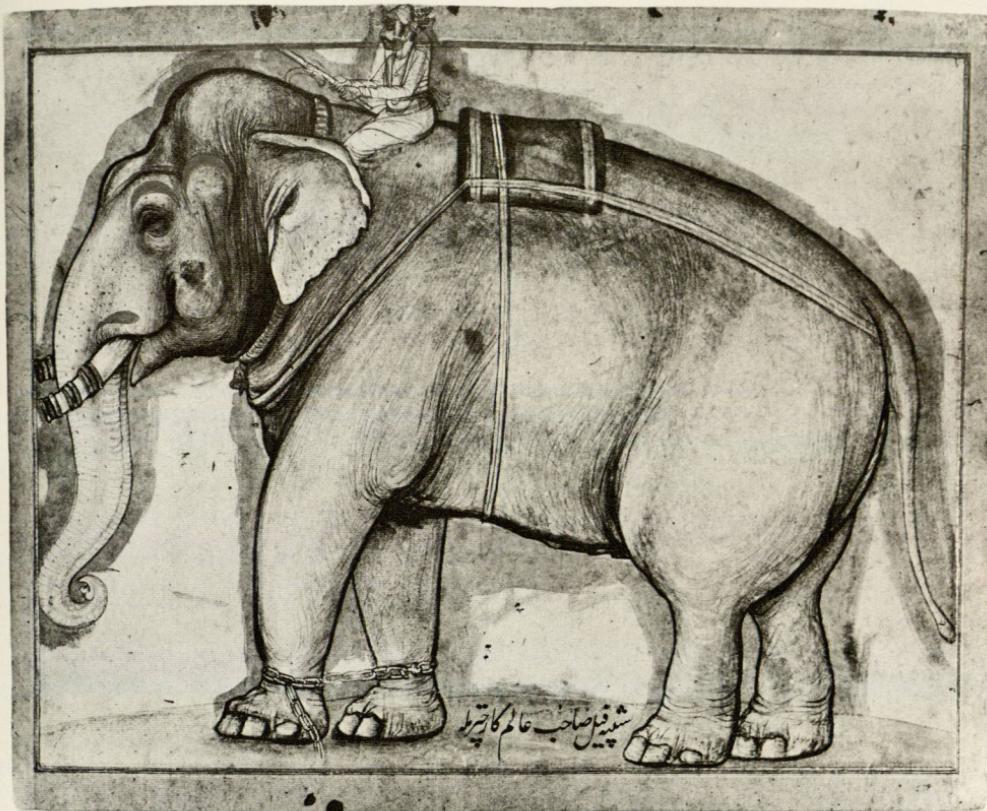
Recto, in Persian: 'Likeness of the elephant of the Master of the World/Work of Chotarmal'

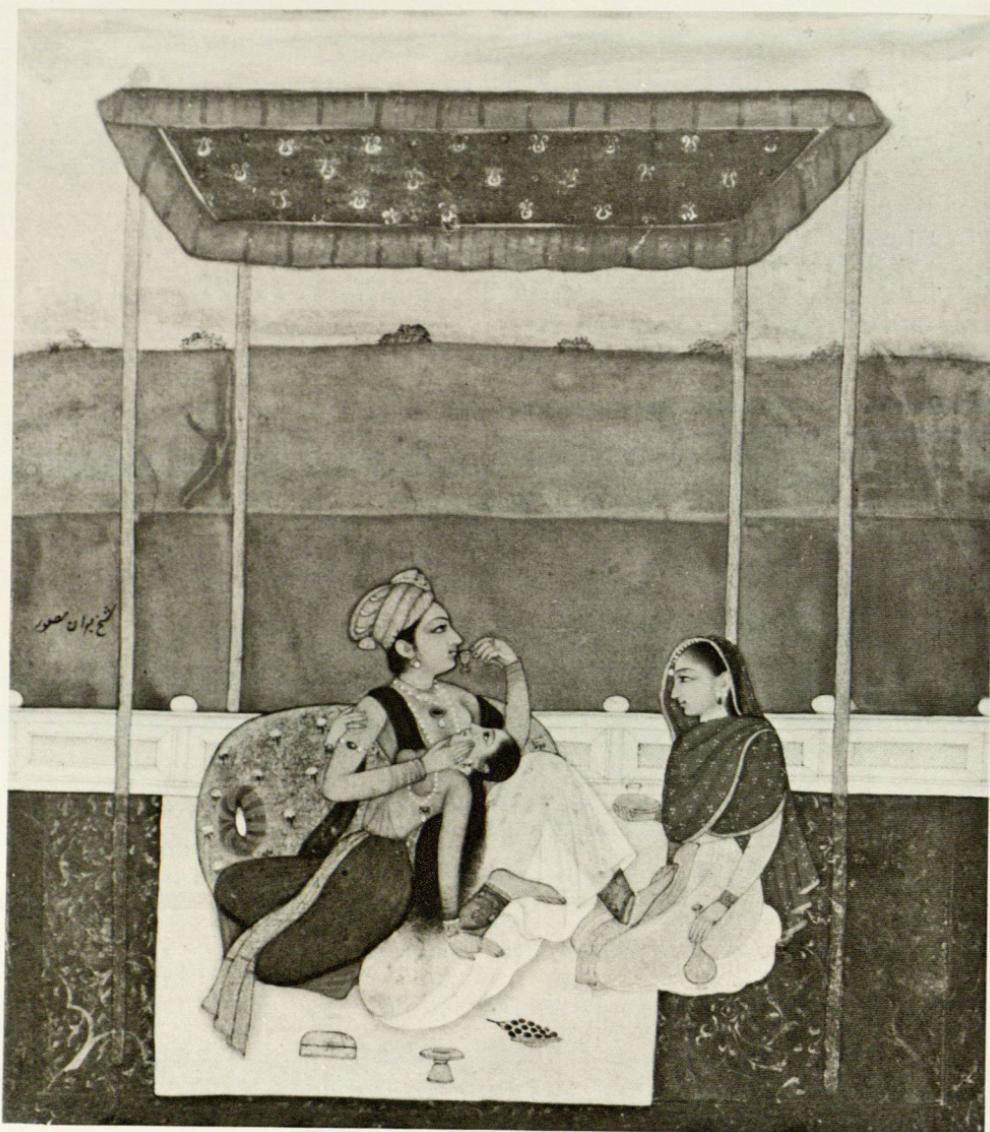
Verso, in Marwari: 'The elephant Ghughli in service to Maharana Karan Singh'; and a poem in Persian by Mallek Abdullah in eight lines circling the outer margins.

This portrait of the elephant Ghughli might be mistaken for a Mughal work if it were not for the inclusion of the *mahout*, who is portrayed with a noticeably fleshy, Rajput nose. It was made for Maharaja Karan Singh of Bikaner (r. 1631–69) who had influenced his painters to adjust their earlier folkloristic style to the more sophisticated standards of the imperial *atelier*. In this work, the elephant's volumetric modelling and the portrait-like individualization are unmistakable Mughal traits, as is the appended artist's signature which presupposes an acceptance of personality as the basis of style.

The elephant was by far the most popular animal subject in Mughal and Rajput painting (see also cat. nos. 11, 13). Each prince had his favourite elephant. The Mughal courtier Abu'l Fazl explains why:

This wonderful animal is in bulk and strength like a mountain; and its courage and ferocity like a lion. It adds materially to the pomp of a king and to the success of a conqueror; and is of the greatest use for the army. Experienced men of Hindustan put the value of a good elephant equal to five hundred horses; and they believe that, when guided by a few bold men armed with matchlocks, such an elephant alone is worth double that number. (Quoted in P. Pal, *Elephants and Ivories*, Los Angeles, 1981, p. 12).





## 24 Two Lovers on a Terrace, with a Maid

By Shaykh Miran

Rajasthan, Bikaner School, *circa* 1680

Opaque watercolour on paper heightened with gold

Tan margins with silver rules

Painting:  $6\frac{3}{4} \times 5\frac{3}{4}$  in (17.2  $\times$  14.6 cm)

Signed in Persian:

*Shaykh Miran Mussawar*

Beginning about 1680 harem scenes became increasingly popular in Indian painting. The widespread taste for this subject seems to reflect an escapist desire to pursue hedonistic pleasures in defiance of the intractable social and political problems which began to trouble the empire. It was only natural that subjects devoted to the highly restricted pastimes of the *zenana* quarters began to replace earlier, less sybaritic themes, since it was there more than ever that the Indian prince passed most of his time.

In this painting, a Bikaner prince (or princess) is enjoying the company of two ladies by a river at dusk. Despite the intense colour and sinuous line, the erotic mood is surprisingly restrained.



## 25 Radha and Krishna seek Shelter from the Rain

Rajasthan, Bundi School, *circa* 1680

Opaque watercolour on paper; red margins

Painting:  $11 \times 6\frac{1}{8}$  in (28×17 cm)

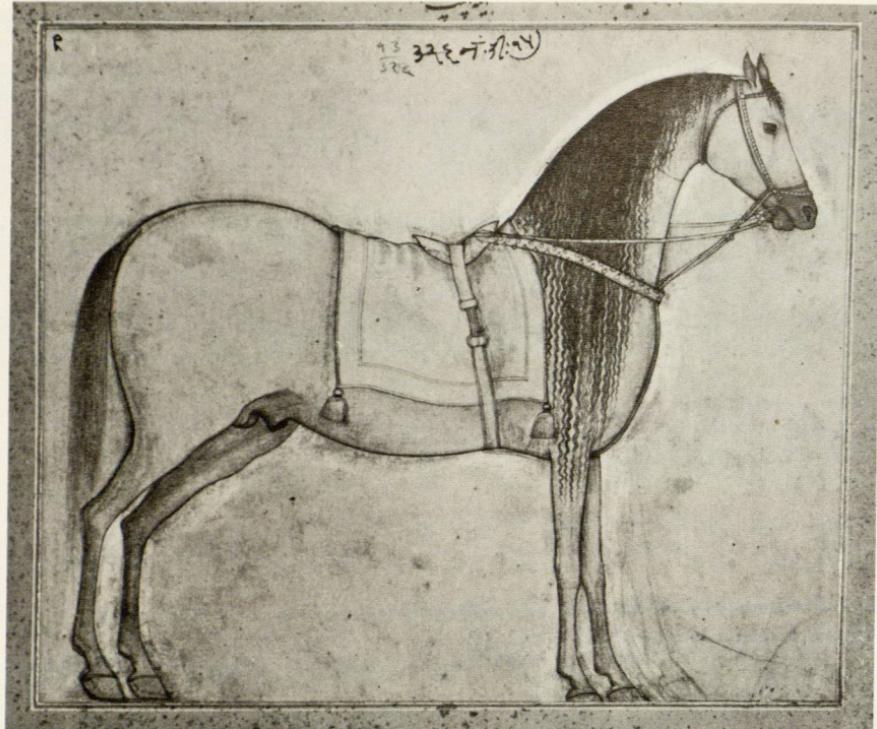
Folio:  $12\frac{1}{8} \times 8\frac{1}{4}$  in (32.4×22.3 cm)

Indian painting depicts romantic love with an ardent simplicity unequalled in world art. Perhaps the most common subject on this characteristically Indian theme involves the amorous adventures of Krishna, eighth incarnation of the god Vishnu, and Radha, the village girl who is his beloved. Although their romantic liaison is often depicted in a highly earthbound way, the underlying meaning is always religious. For the devotees of the Krishna cult, which has flourished in India since the 15th century, Krishna's amorous affairs express the love of God for the soul. Krishna is God and Radha, his consort, symbolizes the soul. Their impassioned adoration became the most valid road to God for the Krishna devotee, since their love represented the final union which was the ultimate aspiration of all faith.

In this painting from Bundi, Radha and Krishna are seated in the flowering bower, carpeted with lotus petals, a favourite setting for their amorous trysts. Although Radha's mortal anxieties had resulted in jealousy and mutual estrangement on previous occasions, in this painting they are untroubled by these earlier worries; their understanding is complete. Nature itself reflects the perfect union. The mingling of clouds, rain and lightning symbolize the couple's earlier embrace; trees, flowers and aquatic birds are balanced in a harmonious duality which is divinely inspired – indeed, supercharged. Romantic paintings of this type, with their glowing patches of colour and spiritualized forms, were a speciality of Bundi, Mewar and other centres of 17th century Rajasthani painting, which had long resisted the secularizing impulse of the imperial Mughal style, with its emphasis on naturalism and observed fact. A purely secular version of this same theme, painted in Rajasthan at roughly the same date, yet in a 'Mughalized' style, is cat. no.24.







26

## 26 A Horse in Profile

Rajasthan, Kishangarh School, early 18th century

Drawing in ink and brush heightened with white

Mounted on an album page with tan margins speckled with silver and ruled in gold

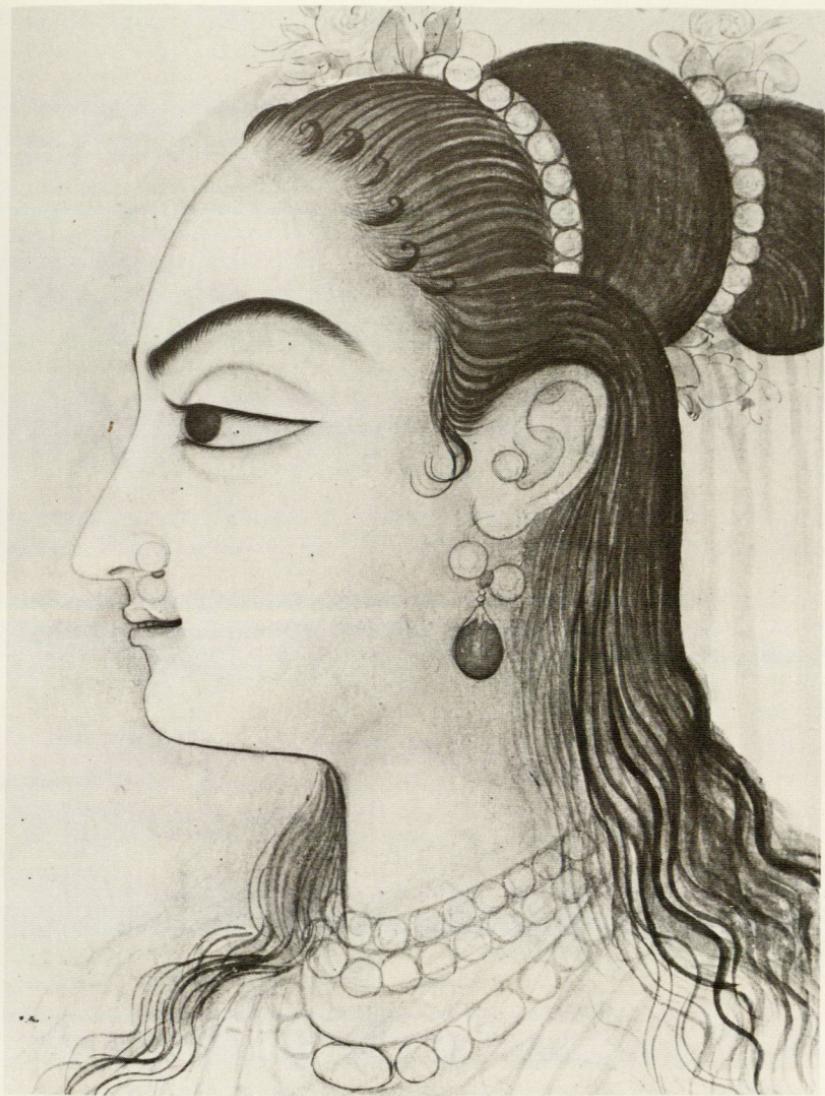
Drawing:  $9\frac{1}{4} \times 11\frac{1}{4}$  in (24.6 x 29.8 cm)

Folio:  $12\frac{1}{2} \times 17$  in (31.5 x 43.2 cm)

Inscribed in Persian and Hindi:  
'This horse'/'The likeness of a horse'

Kishangarh was named after its founder, Kishan Singh, who was granted title to this small state by the Mughal emperor Akbar in the late 16th century. Although closely linked to Mughal culture, Kishangarh became an important artistic centre in its own right. The present early example of the pictorial style favoured by the Kishangarh princes is therefore extremely close, yet by no means inferior, to a type of animal study which was popular at the Mughal court at the same time. The horse's silhouette, which has been whitened and redrawn numerous times to achieve its elegant contour, might be mistaken for a Mughal work if it were not for the distinctive swan-like exaggeration of form which is a tell-tale Kishangarh trait. (For a Mughal horse of circa 1701 which is very close to the present work, see S. C. Welch, *Indian Drawings and Painted Sketches*, New York, 1976, pp. 56-58, no. 22.)





27

## 27 A Lady in Profile

Rajasthan, Kishangarh School, circa 1740–60

Drawing in brush and ink heightened with coloured washes

12½×8¾ in (31.1×22.8 cm) irregular

Actual portraits of women are rare in Indian art on account of the social taboos which kept the sexes on opposite sides of a *purdah* curtain. This 'portrait' is therefore an idealization, an image of taste and fashion, rather than an actual likeness. It is drawn with a wet brush and coloured washes in a remarkably fresh and direct style which is distinctive of Kishangarh, where a sophisticated graphic tradition existed (see cat. no. 26). This technique is rarely found elsewhere. (For a drawing on a distantly related theme, and in a comparable technique, see S. C. Welch, *Indian Drawings and Painted Sketches*, New York, 1976, p. 118, no. 66.)



## 28 Maharaja Savant Singh addressing his Son

Rajasthan, Kishangarh School, *circa* 1760

Opaque watercolour on paper heightened with gold and silver  
12 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 7 $\frac{1}{8}$  in (31.1 × 20 cm)

### Inscription

Verso, in Hindi: 'Sadar Singh . . . (illegible) . . . Kishan Singh'

On a first trip to Kishangarh, in the heart of Rajasthan, the unprepared traveller will be disappointed to find this famous centre of Indian painting a small and dusty place of minor interest. The brilliant artists who flourished here in the 17th and 18th centuries would have one believe otherwise. The landscape they depicted, although tenuously based on fact, never actually existed. It was a poetic image only: a tangle of flowering trees and jungle creepers and a seemingly endless panorama of lakes and verdant hills, with palaces and pavilions, all illuminated by the unwavering light of a constant sunset. It is a common misconception to believe that Indian painting is not concerned with landscape. Kishangarh painters, among others, disprove this fallacy: their poetic gloss on nature is worthy of Claude.

A typical stretch of Kishangarh landscape appears in the background of the present painting. The work portrays one of the greatest patrons of the art-loving royal family, Maharaja Savant Singh (1699–1764). Both he and his father, Maharaja Raj Singh (r. 1706–48), shared the family love of dance and music; remarkably enough, they were both practicing painters as well. (Savant Singh, under the *nom-de-plume* of Nagari Das, was also a serious poet of some distinction.) As a patron of painters, he is best remembered for his creative collaboration with the artist Nihal Chand (fl. 1730–80) and for commissioning the brilliant series of visionary works which are among the finest expressions in Indian art of the romantic Krishna legends. (See E. Dickinson and K. Khandalavala, *Kishangarh Painting*, New Delhi, 1959.) In this work Savant Singh is addressing his son, Sardar Singh (1730–66), while three court officials attend. Sardar Singh was appointed regent when Savant Singh retired, soul-weary and disillusioned, in the year 1757. He succeeded his father as maharaja in the year 1764, and died two years later. (For a portrait of Savant Singh at the age of 46, see S. C. Welch, *A Flower from Every Meadow*, New York, 1973, p.56, no.27; for a portrait of Sardar Singh as maharaja, see E. Dickinson and K. Khandalavala, *op. cit.*, plate X.)

This fine portrait is very close in style to Nihal Chand's work. The glowing landscape, vertical design and use of white are particularly evocative of his distinctive romantic style. If not painted by Nihal Chand himself, it may have been painted by one of his two talented sons (Sitaram or Surajmal), who would have closely imitated their father's style at this date.





## 29 The Durbar of Thakur Nawal Singh of Pali

Rajasthan, Marwar (Jodhpur) School, *circa* 1825

Opaque watercolour on paper; red margins

Folio:  $13\frac{1}{2} \times 17\frac{1}{4}$  in (35.1  $\times$  45 cm)

### Inscriptions

The names of thirty-seven of the forty people portrayed are identified on the verso in Marwari; in some cases their titles and occupations are also noted.

Marwar (also called Jodhpur after its capital city), the largest state in Rajasthan, is a barren, inhospitable land which, apart from a few tracts of arable terrain, is mostly desert. Not surprisingly, the people who endured and even prospered in this harsh realm have become famous throughout India for their enterprise and valour. Thus, according to folklore, the men of Marwar (and the women of Jaisalmer) are the 'best of their kind'. Their soldiers – the Rajput noblemen of the Rathore clan who governed Marwar until Indian Independence – had been dauntless warriors since the 13th century, when they founded the state; while their civilian cousins – Marwaris of the mercantile class – have dominated Indian finance and commerce right up to our own day.

It is not romantic to discern something of the swagger and boldness of these men of the desert in the unusually fine paintings which they commissioned during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Although miniature paintings were produced in Marwar as early as 1623 (see K. K. Singh of Nawalgarh, *An Early Ragamala Ms. from Pali (Marwar School)*, Lalit Kala, no.7, 1960, pp.76–81), the school did not develop a consistent, vernacular style of its own until much later. Fine paintings in a highly refined, immaculately crafted Mughal style were produced in the third quarter of the 17th century for Maharaja Jaswant Singh (r. 1638–78), yet it was not until the reign of Maharaja Man Singh (r. 1803–43) that the particularizing trend which had become discernible in the 18th century reached its final and distinctive culmination. 'The linear rhythm was intensified, the colours began to glow brightly, and men's and ladies' fashion assumed a fantastic extravagance. Turbans grew to high funnels, coats and skirts stood off like bells.' (H. Goetz, *Marwar*, Marg, vol. XI, no.2, 1958, p.46)

A very fine example of this later and most creative phase of Marwari painting is exhibited here. This densely packed portrait group was made for one of the most important nobles of the Marwari court – Nawal Singh, the Thakur of Pali. The town and surrounding areas which the thakur governed constituted one of the more notable districts (*thikanas*) of Marwar state. Pali was not only a rich commercial town, an *entrepôt* connecting the trade routes between the western sea coast and north India, but also a financial centre of sufficient importance to circulate its own currency (see J. Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, London, 1829, reprint Delhi, 1971, vol. II, pp.612–13). In the present work, the ruler of this self-respecting community is depicted at the top centre left, smoking a *huggah*. His brother Bhim Singh is seated to his right, while another brother, Giyan Singh, is seated across from them. An additional thirty-seven figures – all portrait likenesses – are included in this formal scene (*durbar*) and all but three of them are carefully identified on the *verso*. Among these notables are the Pali

prime minister and his chief of cabinet (both on the left in the row of four red turbaned courtiers below Nawal Singh). Pali had been an important centre of painting for at least two hundred years (see K. K. Singh of Nawalgarh, *op. cit.*) and the high quality which the thakurs usually demanded from their painters is evident here: a subject which might have been made a static, archival line-up in the hands of a lesser artist has here become a compositional *tour-de-force*.

### 30 Bhadrakali and Retainers

Illustration from a *Tantric Devi* series

Punjab Hills, Basohli School, circa 1660–70

Opaque watercolour on paper, heightened with tooled gold and silver; affixed beetle wing cases for jewels

Red margins with silver rules

Inscribed on the recto with a short *takri* superscription and the number '57'

Inscribed on the verso in Sanskrit: *Prafulla padma daya venu hastan madham pivam liye parivar yuktam/Pretasanam chandrakala kiroto mani Bhadrakali hridaye smarami/57*

(Bloomingly radiant like a lotus the compassionate one holds wine in hand: seated upon a 'preta' (a spirit of the dead), the crescent moon illuminates her crown/thus Bhadrakali resides in our hearts (or memories))

Folio: 8 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 8 $\frac{1}{16}$  in (20.6 × 22.7 cm)

Indian paintings from the thirty-five feudal states of the Punjab Hills, bordering the Himalayas, rival those from Rajasthan – that other great centre of native painting – in number, originality and quality. In this exhibition we include six paintings from the Punjab Hills, known as Pahari paintings. The present painting once belonged to a series which appears to have initiated, 'like some introductory libation', the tradition from which all later Pahari painting derives (see F. S. Aijazuddin, *Pahari Paintings and Sikh Portraits in the Lahore Museum*, London, 1977, p.3).

The series illustrated various incarnations, attributes and actions of the Great Goddess, or Devi, who is the female energy and divine consort of Shiva. It was painted at Basohli, a tiny state some twenty miles long and fifteen miles wide, which was the unexpected *locus classicus* of the earliest and most brilliant phase of Pahari painting. No convincing reason has so far been proposed for the sudden appearance, around 1660, in a small and geographically remote state, of a new school which was both stylistically coherent and fully evolved. Whatever the explanation, the hallmarks of the early Basohli style – the burning, intense colours and enamelled surfaces; the rounded, ecstatic figures with dilated eyes; and the overall feeling of passionate involvement which (to quote Archer) 'is contained and made exhilarating by an obvious pictorial discipline' – are unlike anything previously seen in Indian painting. Another distinctive feature of the early Basohli school is the use of beetle wing cases, fixed to the paintings, to simulate emerald jewelry.

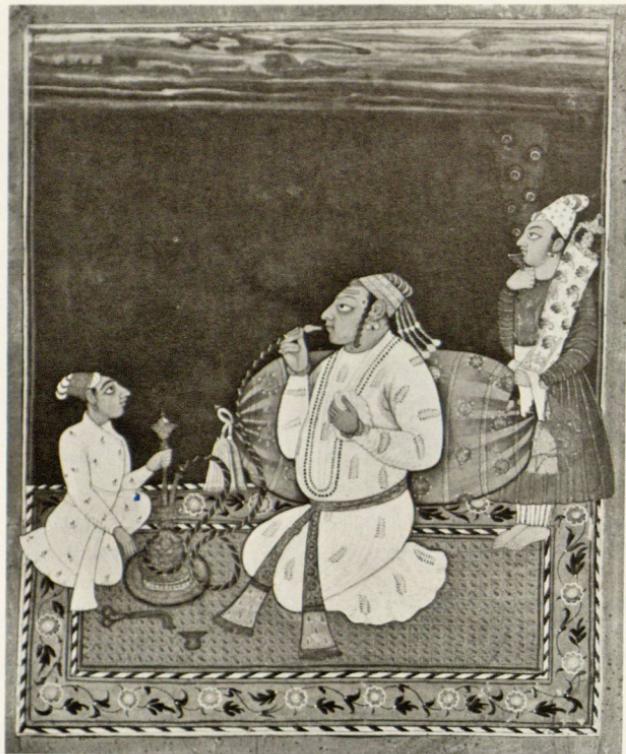
All of these characteristics are discernible in the present work, which depicts the Devi, appearing as Bhadrakali, the Dark Mother, in a style of 'barbaric magnifi-



cence and wild sophisticated luxury' (to quote Archer's description of the series once again). The spiritual intensity of this painting and the series as a whole suggests that the remarkable qualities of early Basohli and Pahari painting may have resulted from the religious revival which swept through the states of the Punjab Hills during the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

The *Tantric Devi* series to which this painting belongs may have comprised as many as eighty paintings; but only about twenty of these appear to have survived. Eight of these have been published (see W. G. Archer, *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, London 1973, vol. I, pp.33–34 and vol. II, plate 16; F. S. Aijazuddin, *op. cit.*, pp.3–4, plates 6–7; and S. Kramrisch, *Manifestations of Shiva*, Philadelphia, 1981, no.P47). Single unpublished examples are in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Art and in various private collections.





31

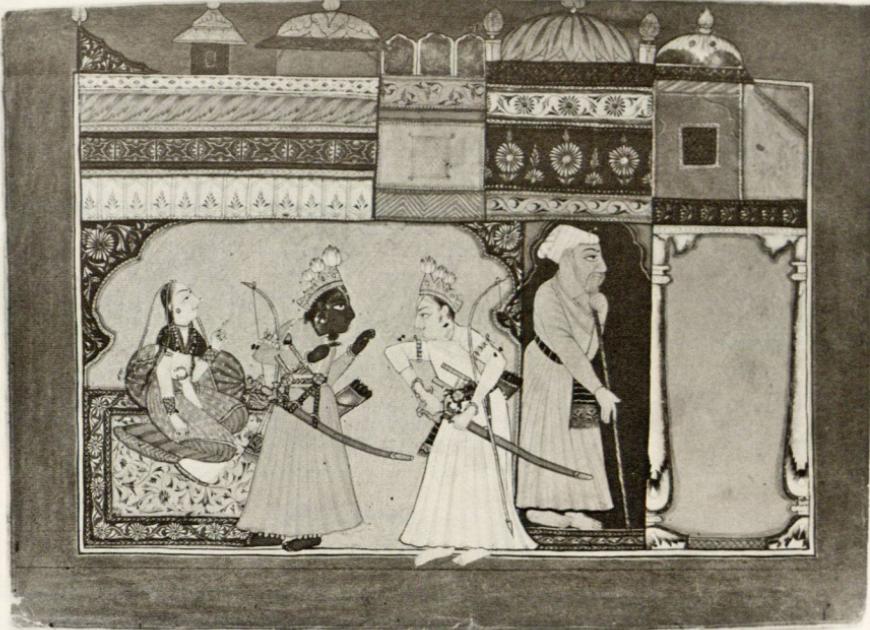
### 31 Prince Datha Dev and Retainers

Punjab Hills, Mankot School, *circa* 1670–80

Opaque watercolour on paper, heightened with tooled gold and silver; red margins (right margin restored)

Folio: 8½×7¾ in (22.2×18.8 cm)

According to a flyleaf which was originally attached to this painting, the young prince smoking a *huqqah* is Datha Dev, heir apparent of Mankot, a small yet art-historically important state in the Punjab Hills. Very little is known of the Mankot rajas; even the dates of their reigns are highly conjectural. Datha Dev is thought to have ruled for the period *circa* 1680/90–1710. W. G. Archer, the leading authority on Indian paintings from the Punjab Hills, has published a portrait of Datha Dev in middle age which he dates *circa* 1690 on stylistic grounds (*Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, London, 1973, plate 268, no. 11). The fleshy nose and bull-neck are the same in both portraits, although in the present work the future raja is clearly much younger, and he is not nearly so fat. For this as well as stylistic reasons, we date this painting *circa* 1670–80. This date is also consistent with other features – the dark monochrome background and narrow strip of sky, the curvilinear and unshaded drawing style, the arrangement of the figures and their relationship to surrounding space – which recall *Bhadrakali and Retainers* from the *Tantric Devi* series painted in neighbouring Basohli state about ten years earlier (see cat. no. 30.) It is not surprising that relationships should exist between these two schools: Datha Dev was the brother-in-law of the reigning Basohli raja, so artists from his *atelier*, which was pre-eminent in the Punjab Hills, must have frequently visited nearby Mankot.



32

### 32 Rama commands Lakshmana to take Sita away

Illustration from the Shangri *Ramayana* series (Style 1)

Punjab Hills, Kulu School, circa 1690–1700

Opaque watercolour on paper, heightened with tooled gold and silver; red margins

Folio: 8½×12 in (21.6×30.5 cm)

This painting and the following example (cat. no.33) from the well-known Shangri *Ramayana* series painted at Kulu, deep in the Himalayas, reflects the influence of the brilliant Basohli *atelier* which had pioneered a revolutionary style of painting in the Punjab Hills in the years 1660–80. During the following half century the influence of Basohli artists was all-important throughout the area, though regional variations are perceptible. Kulu painting is especially distinctive because, unlike the classic control of colour and form in Basohli painting, it is—as described by W. G. Archer—‘farouche, intense and frenzied’.

Archer has also observed a parallel between the fierce style of painting peculiar to Kulu and the awesome character of the local scenery—a harsh landscape of grim pine trees and gloomy mountain gorges which ‘seemed to us a sort of *ultima Thule*’ (*Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, London, 1973, vol. I, p.327). Whether or not there was in this case a true connection between environment and art, the mood of frenzied disquiet characterizing the best Kulu painting is particularly suited to the subject illustrated here (from Book VII, *Uttara Kanda*, chapter 45).

After much tribulation the great hero Rama has finally vanquished the forces of evil in order to regain Sita his wife, who has been abducted by the demon Ravana. In his hour of victory, Rama has succumbed to slandering gossip and, to his discredit, has decided to exile Sita, although her conduct during her period of captivity was blameless as Rama at heart well knows.



The present painting, illustrating the moment when Rama is instructing Lakshmana to take Sita away, is appropriately imbued with a sinister and tragic atmosphere.

### 33 King Dasaratha goes to King Janaka's Court

Illustration from the Shangri *Ramayana* series (Style 2)

Punjab Hills, Kulu School, *circa* 1690–1700

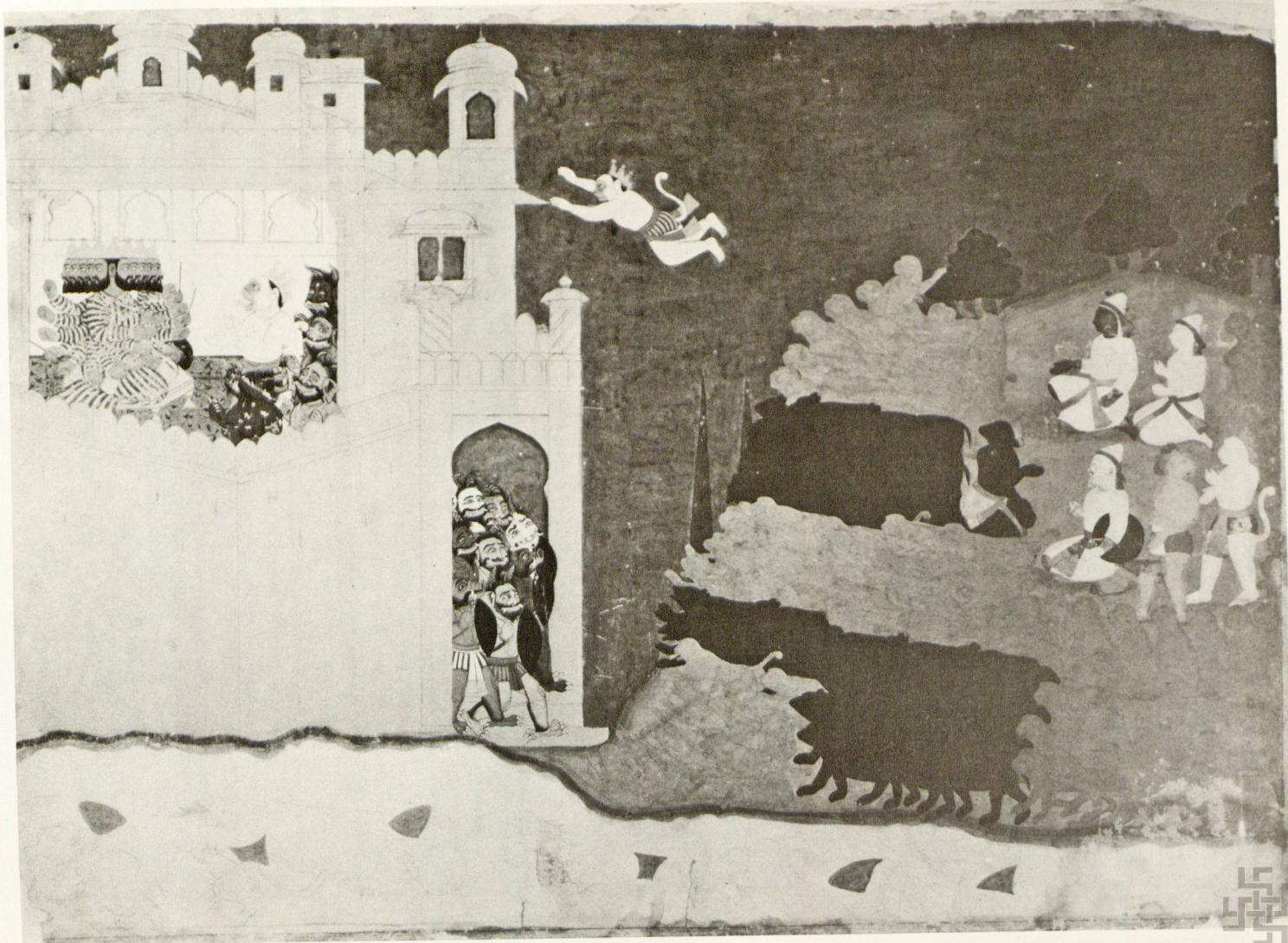
Opaque watercolour on paper; red margins

Folio:  $8\frac{1}{8} \times 13\frac{1}{16}$  in (22.5×33.2 cm)

This painting illustrates Book I (*Bala Kanda*) chapter 69 of the *Ramayana*. When Rama was a youth he visited the court of King Janaka of Mithila and it was there that he bent the Great Bow of Shiva which no one previously had even managed to lift. By this feat Rama won the hand of King Janaka's guardian, the lovely Sita. In preparation for their marriage, messengers were sent to fetch Rama's father, King Dasaratha of Ayodhya, who is shown in this painting with his army, rishis and courtiers. He is met by King Janaka, who has come forth with a similar party, including Rama and Lakshmana, who greet their father.

The well-known Shangri series, to which this painting and the preceding example (cat no.32) belong, is named after the descendant of the Kulu rajas who once owned it. It consists of the earliest known paintings from Kulu, a major centre for painting in the Punjab Hills in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The paintings from this remarkable series can be classified according to four distinctive styles. Style 1, the most expressive (see cat. no.32), illustrates incidents from Books I and II of the *Ramayana*, as well as various incidents from the final book. Style 2 illustrates incidents from the first two books alone. Both Styles 1 and 2 are usually dated *circa* 1690–1700. Styles 3 and 4, more thinly painted and far less heavily burnished, are usually dated very slightly later, ie. *circa* 1700–1710. Unlike the disturbing ferocity of Style 1, as W. G. Archer has noted, Style 2 is milder, more orderly and restrained. It is appropriate for the present subject, illustrating an early, optimistic moment in the story.

The Shangri *Ramayana*, which originally comprised about 270 paintings, was dispersed in 1961. About two-thirds of the paintings in the series are now in the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi; while the rest are in other Indian museums, as well as in numerous public and private collections in Europe and America. For a discussion of the complete series, see W. G. Archer, *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills*, London 1973, vol. I, pp.325–329, and vol. II, plates 238–243. For two paintings from the series which directly precede and follow the narrative depicted in the present work, see W. G. Archer, *Visions of Courty India*, Washington, 1976, nos.47–48.



### 34 Rama sends Angada to Ravana

Illustration to the Siege of Lanka *Ramayana* series

Punjab Hills, Guler School, circa 1725–1730

Opaque watercolour on paper, heightened with gold (unfinished)

23 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 32 $\frac{1}{8}$  in (60 × 82.5 cm)

Lent by a private collector, London

The series to which this unfinished painting belongs is one of the most deservedly renowned in Indian painting. The original series (often called the Siege of Lanka *Ramayana* since most of its known illustrations deal with this subject) may have comprised between 50 and 100 folios. For some unknown reason most of these were never completed. Only about eight illustrations from the entire set are fully painted; the present work and at least two others are partially completed; the vast majority of the remaining illustrations are simply uncoloured drawings in brush and ink. The folios of this series are by far the largest known paintings and drawings from the Punjab Hills and they may well have served as cartoons for wall paintings. Their generous scale is certainly more appropriate to murals than to portfolio pictures.

The present work, like the series as a whole, is particularly interesting in showing the stages by which an Indian painting was traditionally made. Although this painting was never carried to the final stage of completion, the very features which give the completed paintings their particular charm – emphatically plain backgrounds, bold use of gold, vivid naturalism and strongly abstract compositions – can here be seen unhampered by subsidiary detail. Thus the essential quality of the picture strikes one with unusual force.

The scene is taken from Book VI (*Yuddha Kanda*), chapter 41. The hero Rama with his brothers and a vast army of monkeys and bears have crossed the sea in order to besiege Lanka, the fortress-city of the demon Ravana, who had abducted Rama's wife Sita. Rama and Lakshmana are shown at Lanka's northern gate (their lieutenants have occupied key positions elsewhere) and the hills on which their vast forces are deployed have disappeared beneath their combined numbers. Before launching his final attack, Rama has chosen to send Angada, Prince of the Monkeys, to demand Sita's release once again. This nimble monkey appears twice in the painting: in flight, he links the two halves of the composition and, seated on the left, he appears with Ravana in a palace chamber. Of course the multi-headed demon will ignore Angada's demand and soon thereafter the armies will advance 'like the winds that blow at the dissolution of the worlds'.



### 35 A Prince on Horseback

Punjab Hills, Jammu School, *circa* 1750

Opaque watercolour on paper; narrow brown margins

Corners restored

Folio: 10½×10 in (27.2×25.3 cm)

The artistis of Basohli, Mankot, Kulu and other pioneering centres of early painting in the Punjab Hills did not maintain their splendid isolation from the main currents of Indian art for more than about sixty or seventy years. The *Ramayana* painting previously illustrated (cat. no.34) shows that by *circa* 1725–30 the Guler artist who painted it was already aware of developments in landscape painting and with the experiments in pictorial scale which preoccupied fashionable artistic circles in Delhi, the imperial capital, during the reign of Muhammad Shah (1719–1748).

From this time on, with the increasing influence of the Mughal imperial style throughout the Punjab Hills, the fiery intensity of the earlier regional styles was tempered and Pahari painting gradually became simpler and more spacious in style, cooler in palette and far more naturalistic. This development reached its apogee in the hill state of Jammu in the mid 18th century. The degree to which, by this date, a Mughal preoccupation with line had replaced an indigenous preoccupation with colour can be seen by comparing the present work with any of the other 17th century paintings from the Punjab Hills in this exhibition. While monochrome backgrounds in vivid or saturated tints are an essential component in the 'colour field' aesthetics of early paintings, in the present work, except for a curving rim of cloudy sky, the background is unimportant; its colour is provided by the natural tint of the paper alone. Line and volume are all important and modulations in tone have replaced an earlier, more abstract, system of construction by colour.

It seems that a remarkable family of artists, issuing from a painter called Pandit Seu, was in large part responsible for popularizing the more naturalistic and humanistic style which became dominant in Pahari painting by the middle of the 18th century. The supple drawing style, which is the foundation of this new mode of painting, is seen at its best in the work of the artist Nainsukh (*circa* 1724–78), who was one of the most remarkable painters in the history of Indian art. The greater part of Nainsukh's career was spent at Jammu in the service of an extraordinary, art-loving patron, Raja Balwant Singh (1724–63). The present painting is very close in style to Nainsukh's work. In fact, the youthful equestrian figure bears a close resemblance to the nephew of Nainsukh's patron, Raja Brijraj Dev (1735–81). The plain background, delicate vegetation and elegant silhouette recall Nainsukh's work, as does the naturalistic drawing and underlying geometric simplification. (The Mughal origin of these characteristics can be seen by comparing this painting with Hunhar's *Portrait of Shah Alam*, cat. no.15.) We believe that the present work must have been painted by one of Nainsukh's four talented sons.



35



Indira Gandhi National  
Centre for the Arts



36 Krishna fights Jambhavana, King of the Bears, in his Mountain Cave.  
Folio 34 verso (chapter 56).



### 36 A profusely illustrated Bhagavata Purana Manuscript

South India, Mysore School, early 19th century

A Kannada translation of the original Sanskrit text (Book X, chapters 49–86)

218 ruled folios with 35 lines of text in ancient Kannada script

215 illustrations (some unfinished) in opaque watercolour heightened with gold

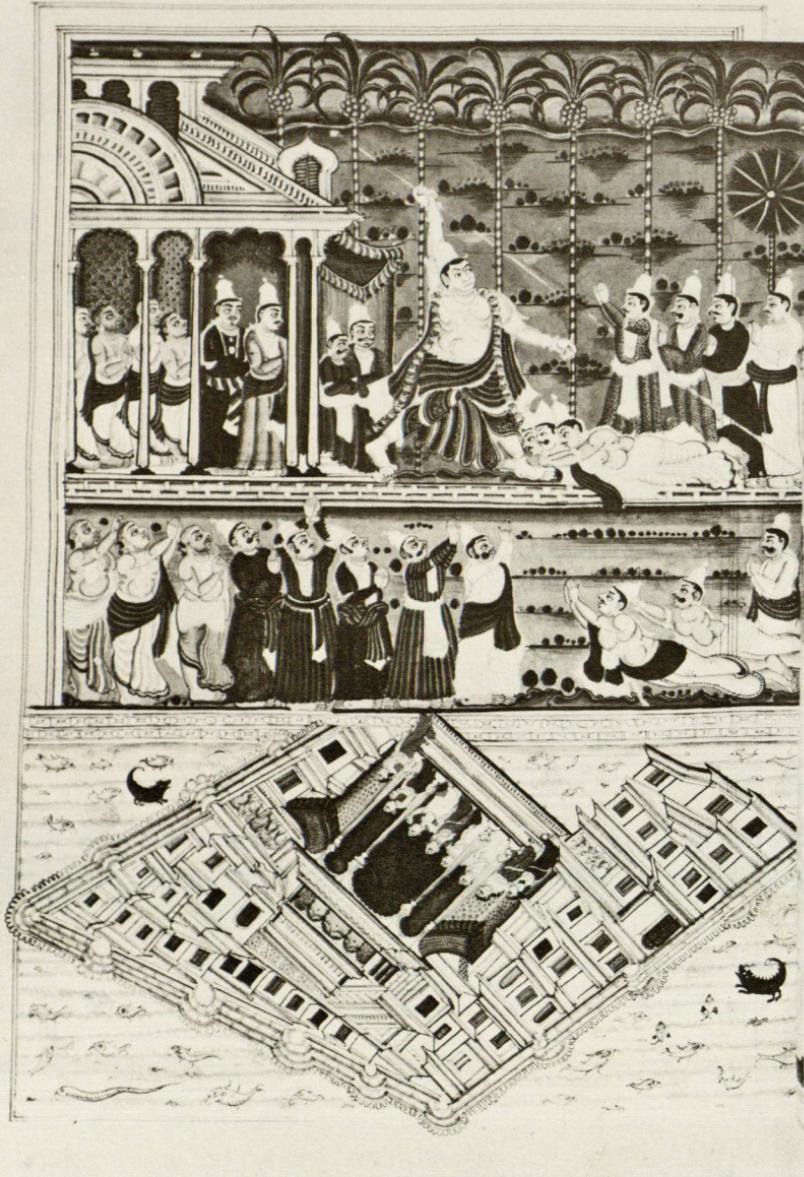
Folios: 12×8½ in (30.5×21.2 cm)

Library Stamp: 'His Highness/Rajah of Mysore'

The triangle of land south of the Tungabhadra River, the vast tract running from the Deccan to Cape Comorin, has remained distinct from the rest of India from the time of the Aryans until the present day. The peoples of Mysore, the Tamil country and Kerala speak Dravidian, non-Aryan languages. They also share a common and distinctive tradition of literature, social conventions, music and art. The best South Indian paintings compare favourably with works produced anywhere else in India; yet they are extremely rare and their history is virtually uncharted territory. The South Indian manuscript catalogued here, illustrated with 215 paintings, is therefore of considerable interest. The manuscript is highly important in its own right; moreover, as an art historical document, it demonstrates that a sophisticated school of painting existed at the Mysore court during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. That this will surprise most specialists is a measure of our present rudimentary knowledge.

The Wadiyars of Mysore were feudal chiefs of the kings of Vijaynagar (1336–1565), the great Hindu state which had dominated South India and acted as a bulwark against the Muslim advance across the rest of India. Following the Vijaynagar collapse, the Wadiyars became rulers of the independent kingdom of Mysore, a former province of Vijaynagar, where they staunchly maintained the South Indian tradition of cultural and political independence from the North. The sophisticated school of painting of which they had become the guardians continued the classical Vijaynagar style into the 17th century. This is clear from two important works which have survived: a superb large painting on cloth dating from the early 17th century (State Museum, Hyderabad), and an illustrated manuscript of the *Mahabharata* dated 1670 (see J. Mittal, *Andhra Paintings of the Ramayana*, Hyderabad, 1969, p.27). The history of Mysore court painting during the 18th century is less clear; but by this date the Wadiyars had fallen on hard times. They were puppet kings during the rule of Haidar Ali (1763–82) and Tipu Sultan (1782–99), the Muslim courtiers who had usurped power and made Mysore into a great political force. The Wadiyars were only returned to actual power by the British, following the defeat of Tipu Sultan at the battle of Seringapatam (1799).

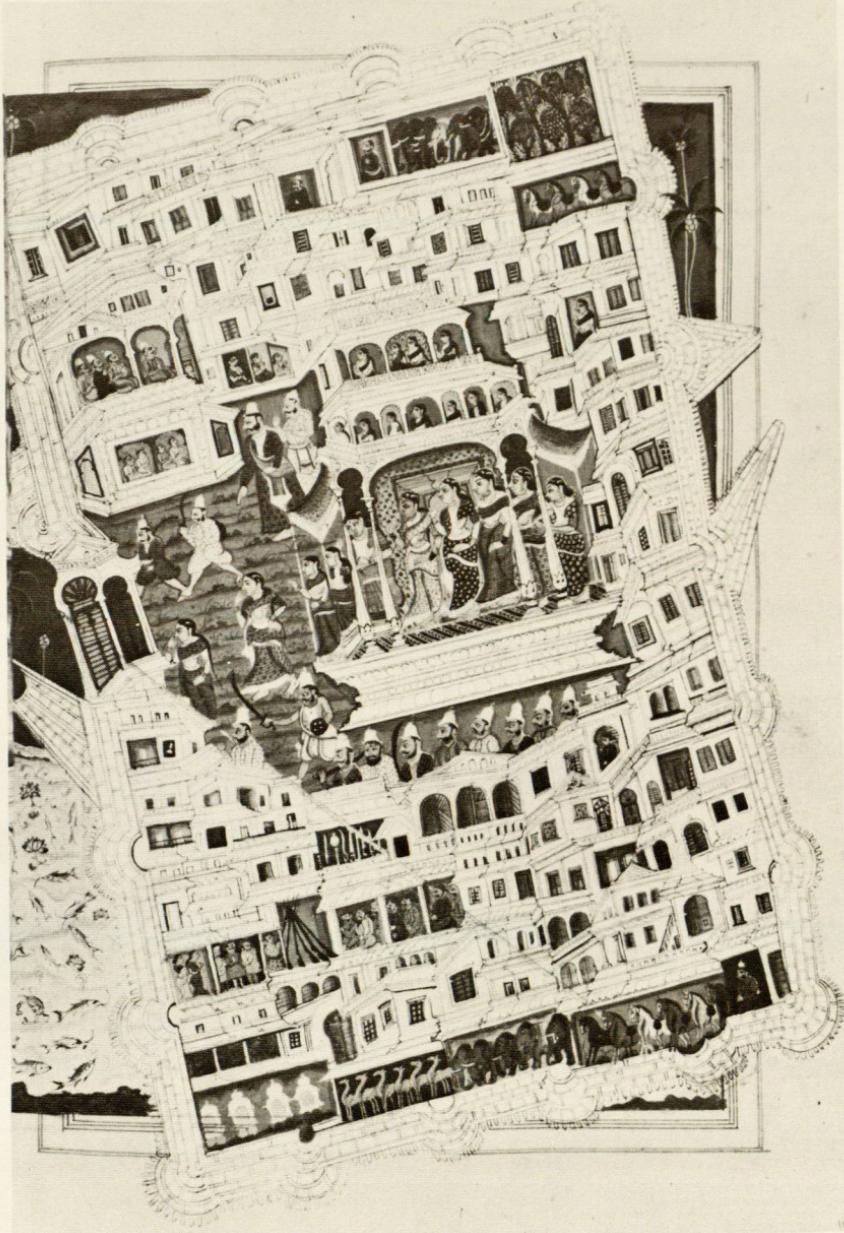
The present manuscript – perhaps celebratory in mood – was probably produced following the defeat of Tipu Sultan; otherwise the presence of British soldiers and Union Jacks in many of the illustrations is difficult to explain. Yet, despite this presumed reference to contemporary events, the manuscript is remarkable for the way in which its illustrations continue an ancient, South Indian pictorial tradition. The ornamental use of gold, compositions in registers, massing of repeated forms and almost obsessive proliferation of detail are elements of an ancient art. This tradition might have degenerated to a merely decorative level,



36 Balarama throws the City of Hastinapur into the Ganges.  
Folio 103 verso (chapter 68).

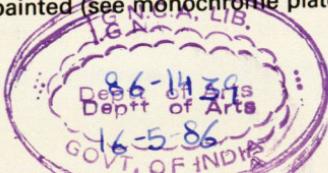
were it not for the dramatic vitality, dynamic rhythm and pictorial imagination elevating its best examples.

This manuscript contains 215 separate illustrations. They range in size from quarter page to full page, and even double page illustrations (there are 18 of these) which are extraordinarily ambitious. The pictorial cycle has been completed to folio 183 *recto* only. The remaining 36 folios are not illustrated, although



36 Balarama throws the City of Hastinapur into the Ganges.  
Folio 104 recto (chapter 68).

the spaces which were left blank for this purpose are annotated with a scribe's note in pencil identifying the intended subject. The finished miniatures are painted in two distinct styles. The first and perhaps earlier style (to about folio 65 recto) is highly detailed and miniaturistic (see colour plate); while the second style is bolder and more thinly painted (see monochrome plates).



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